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A Sample of Understudied Works in Aberdeen MS 123

Bailey Ludwig

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English Department.

Abstract

This project examines and transcribes various understudied texts from the University of Aberdeen's MS 123 in order to create a more complete picture of this manuscript. Chapter one looks at the "Sultan Letters" and "List of Kings," two fictional texts discussing politics, and their evocation of crusades and travel romance genre conventions. The second chapter looks at the intersection of poetic form, vernacularity, gender, and religion in the poem "Modyr of Maries III" and excerpts from the *Golden Legend*. Finally, the third chapter examines two medical texts, "Diet & Bloodletting" and "32 Perilous Days," for their conventionality, vernacularity, and relationship with gender. Altogether, these texts suggest that MS 123 is a miscellany highly characteristic of the time in which it was written.

Introduction

According to University of Aberdeen's online description, the Aberdeen MS 123 is a commonplace book dated c. 1440. While the database categorizes it as a commonplace book, it seems more appropriate to categorize it as a miscellany. Several others who have studied this manuscript, including N. R. Ker and M. C. Seymour, and I have chosen to describe it this way. MS 123 consists of "161 folios, mostly on paper, but also parchment and vellum (the parchment forming the inmost and outermost bifolia of each quire)" (Record View). The size of the book is recorded as 220 x 150 mm, and the binding is from the "eighteenth century" (Seymour). There have been five hands identified, "all writing in the dialect of the far north Midlands" (Record View). This manuscript contains both English and Latin. The description notes that the manuscript has been linked to an Augustinian convent in Warrington which is in Cheshire, England.

Because it is a miscellany, the content of this manuscript covers a variety of subjects. The most common subjects in this book are medicine/astrology and religion, but it also includes a fair amount on politics, history, and science, among other things. The most well-known text within MS 123 is a copy of Chaucer's *Treatise of the Astrolabe*, which makes up about 20 of the 161 folios. The bulk of the texts are written in Latin, but there are still quite a few sections in English. The variety of content and language of this manuscript are typical of miscellanies from around the fifteenth century. Based off of the content, frequent marginal notes, language, and location of this manuscript, it seems likely that it was used as a reference text for the members of this convent.

In order to gain a better understanding of this manuscript, I chose four excerpts on various topics to transcribe and research. Folio 121r, or the "Sultan Letters," as a piece of fiction

within a manuscript otherwise populated by technical texts, stood out to me when I first encountered this manuscript. The unusualness of this text inspired me to do this sampling in order to get a better sense of the manuscript's content and why all of these diverse texts might be in the same book. After cataloguing the content of this manuscript, I chose to select texts regarding politics, religion, and medicine in order to have a good representation of the manuscript's variety. These three topics and their corresponding texts and research became my three chapters. I also found the texts within MS 123, aside from Chaucer's *Treatise*, to be largely understudied. Transcribing the less-studied pieces of this manuscript would make them more accessible and therefore easier for others to study. Ultimately, these selections represent some of the diversity of this manuscript, help to clarify how these different subjects work together in one book, and make these materials more accessible

The first chapter, "The Crusades and English Concepts of the World," looks at the "Sultan Letters" (f.121r) and "List of Kings" (158v to 159r) which fall under the category of politics. These two texts are the most unusual of my selections and appear to be equally as unusual within the context of the manuscript. The "Sultan Letters" include two fictional letters between an unnamed sultan and King Henry VI of England in which the sultan tries to convince Henry VI to marry his daughter, Christianize his kingdom, and help unite the eighteen kingdoms of Christendom (all of which are found in the "List of Kings"). The first letter, supposedly written by the sultan, has been crossed out, highlighting its inconsistency with the rest of the manuscript. The "List of Kings" is a list of Christian kingdoms and their coats of arms (most of which are accurate) that incorporates a few fictional elements, including the aforementioned fictional sultan and Prester John. The "List of Kings" functions as a supplement to the "Sultan Letters" and intermingles the fictional world of these letters with factual elements. Both texts

incorporate elements of crusades and travel romances, linking them to other contemporary fictional texts. In conjunction, these two texts help to demonstrate an English understanding of the world and itself as it was influenced by the crusades. The rest of the manuscript, however, is less interested in fictional materials, especially romance, so the manuscript is not otherwise particularly interested in romance or fictional content. Despite this unusual element, the texts' interaction with and reflection of fifteenth century English culture and beliefs is consistent with the other, more conventional texts in MS 123.

Chapter two, or "Religious Revolutions: Vernacularization and Women," incorporates two texts and comprise my religion category. It focuses primarily on "Modyr of Maries III" (f. 131v to 132v) which is a poem detailing the lineage of St. Anne. The second text can be found in the lower margins of f.131v and 132r which contain Latin excerpts from two chapters of the *Golden Legend*: "The Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary" and "The Holy Innocents." Preceding the verses, at the top of 131v, is a family tree that visually represents the same lineage discussed in the poem. The poem and the family tree both choose to follow the lineage of St. Anne through the maternal side, focusing primarily on Anne's three daughters named Mary and the births of their children. The Latin verses summarize the stories in the *Golden Legend*, which are also the same stories told in the English verses. "Modyr of Maries III" pointedly flips the telling of these stories to be more female-centered, reflecting the interest in femininity and Christianity during the fifteenth century. The vernacularity, poetic form, subject matter, and inclusion of Latin excerpts reflect sermonic traditions of the late Middle Ages and how they were influenced by events such as the plague and Wyclifism. Due to these shifts, the poem may seem a bit different from what one might expect from medieval religious texts, but it is actually highly reflective of the time that it was written in, much like the "Sultan Letters" and "List of Kings."

Because the text is about religion and interacts with the world around it, “Modyr of Maries III” aligns with miscellanies in general and MS 123 specifically.

Chapter three, entitled “Gender and Preventative Care,” looks at two medical calendars. The first is “Diet & Bloodletting” (f.153r to 154r), a bloodletting calendar listing the good and bad days in each month to let blood, the conditions that letting blood at that time may heal, and seasonal lifestyle advice. Two excerpts from a similar text, entitled “32 Perilous Days” (f.154r), follows “Diet & Bloodletting.” In fact, without knowledge of these two texts individually, the excerpts simply appear to be a continuation of “Diet & Bloodletting.” These excerpts list perilous Mondays, and the second focuses specifically on the perils of conceiving or birthing a child on these Mondays. These texts are extremely common during this time period, as well as some years before and after, and can be found in a multitude of other manuscripts. Based off of my comparisons, MS 123’s “Diet & Bloodletting” specifically falls under into the Version B family of texts. Because of their commonness, the medical advice that these texts offer seems to be typical and representative of actual medical practices and beliefs. Gendered advice, which appears in both texts, reveals some of the manifestations of sexism in medieval medicine. The advice incorporates stereotypes about women’s morality, demonstrates a misunderstanding of female anatomy, and highlights the view of men’s bodies as the “norm” and women’s bodies as “other.” MS 123’s particularly versions of these texts even include slight language changes that emphasize the medical, and general, sexism of the fifteenth century. These texts are worth studying both for their conventionality and slight differences. Overall, these texts are extremely typical of their time period and appear in a multitude of other miscellanies, but their minor divergences, and what these divergences say about contemporary perceptions of women, make them all the more important to study.

At the beginning of each chapter, I include a lightly edited transcription of the excerpts that I discuss. To create these transcriptions, I have been using color images provided by the University of Aberdeen's special collections library, thanks to the help of Michelle Gait. In addition to these color images, the university also provided me with an older, black and white scan of the entire manuscript. Using the color images, I created rough and clean transcriptions. I kept the rough transcriptions as close to the original as possible; I only expanded abbreviations and noted these expansions with parentheses. Next, I edited these rough transcriptions for ease of reading. These transcriptions follow the editing style of the Middle English Text Series. I have modernized i/j and u/v in order to avoid confusion and changed "þ" to "th" and "ȝ" to the appropriate "y," "gh," or "g" for clarity. Similarly, I have chosen to change Tironian notes to "and" in my transcriptions. For ease of reading, I kept the expanded abbreviations and removed the parenthesis. The line numbers I have included correspond with the lines in the manuscript. "Modyr of Maries III" is the exception to this, due to the fact that the poem's form has been expanded. The manuscript collapsed the poem's form in order to save space, but my transcription reflects the poem as it should be read. By providing these lightly edited transcriptions, I am working to make these texts more approachable and available to both specialists and non-specialists.

The sampling of these diverse excerpts reveal MS 123's value for scholarly understanding of the fifteenth century. The variety of subjects contained within this manuscript make it a highly conventional miscellany as many of its texts, or like texts, can be found in other roughly contemporary miscellanies. Each specific text that I sampled within this manuscript, furthermore, incorporates many different elements and allusions that demonstrated the interplay of a variety of linguistic, political, and cultural shifts that took place during the time it was

written. For these reasons, MS 123 offers a complex, but conventional, glimpse into the fifteenth century.

Chapter One

Folio 121r

Be it knowen to all Crysten men that I am kyng of all kynges, lord of
 all lordes, Soudon of Surry, Emperour of Babylloun, Steward of Hell,¹
 Porter of Paradys, Constabul of Jerusalem, Lord of all Inde,² floure
 of all the werld, and cosyn to Cryst. I am lord as fer as gres growes
 5 or water flowes or foule flyeth or sun schynes. I am lord above all
 medyl erth as Cryst is above hevyn. I send gretynge and gode love
 to all sondry³ and namly to Herry your kyng.⁴ And he wil wed my
 doghter, I schall becom Crysten and all myne. And tho that wil not bycom
 Crysten, thay schal be brent⁵ or drouned. And I schal gyf hym
 10 IIII myllyonys of gold betwene VII sun rysyngys.⁶ And I
 schal gyf hym tho cros that Cryst dyed on on Gode Fryday and ros
 tho thryd day. And I schal make rest and pes in al Crystendom
 tho which is for to newme⁷ of XVIII kynges⁸ londes of Inglond,
 Scotlond, Fraunce, Ireland, Portyngale, Naberne, Denmark, Sesyle,
 15 Cyprys, Spayne, Norway, Sweth, Cateloun, Wyffiall,⁹ Beme,

¹ Reminiscent the Virgin Mary's title, Empress of Hell, which is mentioned in a marginal note on f.132r.

² Due to the handwriting and context, this can either be read as inde (India) or iude (Judea). I chose to transcribe it as "Inde", because this word occurs more frequently according to the University of Michigan's Middle English Compendium, it is present in roughly contemporary texts, and the word "ynde" appears in f.159rb of this manuscript.

³ each individual

⁴ Likely King Henry VI

⁵ burnt

⁶ a week

⁷ refer to; probably a form of *nevenen*, MED 1: "To mention (sb. or sth.), speak of, refer to, esp. by name"

⁸ There are 18 kings of Christendom listed on f.158va.

⁹ This reference is unclear.

Hungry, Aragoun, and Naples. And I schal make all thes as on¹⁰ and
 make tho kyng of Ingelond emperour, or all mayntein¹¹ Ingland
 ageynes al Crystendom and hethenes.

I, Harry, be tho grace of God, kyng of Ingland and of France, lord of
 20 Ireland, pryncce of Walys, lord of Gyan and Gasquyn, Erle of
 Derby, Duke of Cornwayle, Erle of Chestre, Duke of Lancastre,
 and conquerour of Scotland. Of this message, I thank hym, and of
 his sonde.¹² And of this I take avysement¹³ to tho date of Cryst cum
 to anno millesimo¹⁴ CCCC XLI yere,¹⁵ and then I schal gyf hym answe.

¹⁰ one

¹¹ protect

¹² message

¹³ time for consideration

¹⁴ Thank you to Dr. Marjorie Harrington (@mlkharrington) and Twitter user @gundormr for their help transcribing this section!

¹⁵ 1441

Folio 158va¹⁶

- Thyse ben the namys of the kynges of all Crystendom
- Fyrst the kyng of Fraunce
- The kyng of Engelande
- The kyng of Spayne
- The kyng of Aragoyne
- 5 The kyng of Portyngale
- The kyng of Naverne
- The kyng of Hyingarye
- The kyng Boeme
- The kyng of Polome
- 10 The kyng of Dacie¹⁷
- The kyng of Norway
- The kyng of Swesyn
- The kyng of Scottys
- The kyng of Cecyle
- 15 The kyng of Naplez
- The kyng of Jherusalem
- The kyng of Cypres
- The kyng of Ermeyny

¹⁶ This (a) refers to the folio's left column. B refers to the right column.

¹⁷ Denmark; likely deriving from *dania* (Harrington 393), the Medieval Latin name for Denmark, sometimes spelled *dacia* ("Boethius of Sweden (Dacia)").

Folio 158vb¹⁸

The emperour of Rome berys of
20 golde¹⁹ an Egle of Sable.²⁰

The emperour of Grece beres of goullys²¹
a crosse of golde with IIII B.²²

The emperour of Trapassonde berys
of golde a double egle of goullys.

25 The kyng of Fraunce berys of
asure²³ III floures de lyse of gold.

The kyng of Yngland berys of goullys
III lebbartes of gold passant.²⁴

The kyng of Spayne berys quartly²⁵

¹⁸ From here on, this section describes coats of arms.

¹⁹ Or (gold or yellow)

²⁰ Sable (black)

²¹ Gules (red)

²² Appears to be an abbreviation, but it is unclear how it should be expanded. Due to the context, it is likely a heraldry term.

²³ Azure (blue)

²⁴ Describes the attitude (or position) of the leopards. They are facing left and walking with the front right leg and tail raised.

²⁵ Divided into four parts.

30 sylvur²⁶ and goullys a purpyl²⁷ lyon mountant²⁸
and a castel of golde.

The kynge of Aragoyne berys gold
and goullys paly.²⁹

The kyng of Portyngale berys sylvur
35 of V skuchous³⁰ of asure in ylk scochon³¹
V penys³² a bordure of goules with V
castely of golde.

Folio 159ra

The kyng of Navern berys
goules a carbocle³³ of golde.

The kyng of Boeme berys goullys
a lyon of sylvur forchy.³⁴

²⁶ Argent (silver or white)

²⁷ Purpure (purple)

²⁸ Rearing up. This word is present in Middle English and derives from French, and it means “rising.” It can be used to describe attitude, but it appears in other contexts as well. The more common term for this attitude is rampant.

²⁹ Pale: a vertical stripe down the center of the coat of arms, occupying one third of the space.

³⁰ Escutcheon: a heraldic term for shield. It can indicate the shape of the coat of arms, but, in this case, it refers to five small shields included in the coat’s design.

³¹ Inescutcheon: a smaller shield contained within a larger shield. This describes five small shields, containing five even smaller shields.

³² a coin

³³ Carbuncle: stone.

³⁴ Fourchée: forked tail.

5 The kyng of Hungary berys
sylvur and gowles barry.³⁵

The kyng of Polenye berys
goullys a kyng rydand of sylvur.

The kyng of Scotland berys golde
10 a lyon goulez a doubyll
tressoure³⁶ florre³⁷.

The kyng of Denmark berys of
goules II lebbartz of sable
passant.

15 The kyng of Norway berys goules
a lyoun of gold with an ax of sylvur.

The kyng of Swesyn berys asure
III crownys of golde.

³⁵ Red and white stripes.

³⁶ Double tressure: two thin bands in the shape of the coat of arms, set in slightly from the edges of the coat.

³⁷ Likely describing a flory-counter-flory, which is several fleur-de-lis incorporated into a double tressure.

The kyng of Naplez berys asure
20 flurete³⁸ golde a label³⁹ of goullys
of V.

The kyng of Cesyll berys silvur
an egle of sable with a crowne
of golde.

Folio 159rb

25 The kyng of Cypres berys
barry sylvur and asure of lyon
of goullys forchy.

The kyng of Jherusalem berys sylvur
a crosse potent⁴⁰ of golde with V
30 lyttyl of the same.

The kyng of Sauastopolo⁴¹ berys
asure an ymage of Seynt Jorge

³⁸ Likely flourette, which means decorated with fleur-de-lis (“Heraldry Dictionary”)

³⁹ Label: a banner with typically rectangular pendants coming down (in this case, there are five pendants), meant to be reminiscent of a strap worn around a horses chest (“Heraldry Dictionary”).

⁴⁰ Potent: a crutch head shape. Here, this describes the crosses’ ends, which have lines at the tips like capital “T”s.

⁴¹ Thank you to Dr. Michael Livingston (@medievalguy) and Dr. Sjoerd Levelt (@SLevelt) for their help transcribing this section!

of sylvur.

The kyng of Sardeyn berys of
35 sylvur to egles of sable.

The kyng of Ermony berys golde
a crownys lyon of goullys

Preter John⁴² emperour of Ynde berys
asure a crucifix of golde.

40 The soudan⁴³ berys sable a chalys
of golde.

⁴² Prester John: fictional Christian emperor of India.

⁴³ Seems to be referring to the sultan from f.121r.

The Crusades and English Concepts of the World

Folio 121r (“Sultan Letters,” from this point on) and 158v-159r (“List of Kings”) are two interconnected texts within the University of Aberdeen’s MS123. The “Sultan Letters” establish a narrative between a fictional sultan and the historical King Henry VI of England. The “List of Kings” supplements this narrative by expanding on the kingdoms of Christendom mentioned in the “Sultan Letters” and making reference to the letters’ sultan. These two excerpts, dependently and independently, present a concept of global Christendom written from an English perspective for and English audience. This chapter will focus primarily on the “Sultan Letters” and their use of romance subgenre conventions (including crusades romance and travel romance) and evocation of contemporarily popular character archetypes in order to recognizably communicate Western imperialist ideologies as they were influenced by the crusades. I will look at the “List of Kings” secondarily, specifically how it expands the letters’ concept of the world as well as contributes to the texts’ links to travel romance, specifically through its combination of fiction and nonfiction. Together, these texts clearly outline crusades-era England’s perceived sense of superiority as well as their understanding of those deemed Other.

The “Sultan Letters” demonstrate a particular interest in place through their listing of locations, which, in effect, constructs a sense of Us and Them. The naming of locations functions to situate Henry VI in the West and the sultan in the East, which constructs a binary and places the two figures on opposing sides.⁴⁴ In his letter, the sultan establishes himself as a

⁴⁴ It is important to note here that the terms East and West, which I will be using throughout the rest of this chapter to describe the realms of the sultan and Henry, are unclear and complicated terms. The bounds of both of these spaces are, and always have been, unclear and function more to establish a sense of Us and Them/Here and There than actually describe physical, mappable space. I still choose to use them, due to the vagueness and complexity of the concepts of place in these texts. Just as the boundaries of the East and West are unclear, which kingdoms of Christendom fall under which particular category are equally as unclear. Most importantly, the terms East and West carry with them a history of othering and exoticism that are essential to understanding the implications of this manuscript’s construction of the world.

distinctly Eastern figure by tying himself to “Surry” (Syria), “Babyloun” (Babylon), “Jerusalem” (Jerusalem), and “Inde” (India) (f.121r, lines 2-3). Similarly, Henry locates himself in the West, particularly in “Inglond” (England), “France,” “Walys” (Wales), and “Scotland,” among other specific locations within England and France (f.121r, lines 19-22). The focus on kingdoms of Christendom in Europe and Asia, as opposed to non-Christian communities or kingdoms in other areas of the world, in these texts twists the implications of this binary in a crusades-specific way. Instead of looking at religious difference, the texts focus on building a sense of the Christian West (Us) and the Christian East (Them) in locations significant to the crusades. Focusing on global Christendom assumes a sort of crusader success. It reflects the medieval desire to “[claim] an unproblematized Christian presence of some kind everywhere, in a world genially suffused by universal Christian traces [and...] the desire in the West for Christianity to exist, and proliferate, over the world” (Heng *Empire* 271). The willingness of a sultan, controlling a large portion of the desirable East, to convert himself and his entire kingdom to Christianity and submit to the rule of Henry fulfills the colonizing fantasy driving the crusades. These texts reduce the crusades to an East/West binary, in which the East is willing to subject itself to Western, particularly English, rule and Christian conversion, thus presenting a simplified fantasy of England’s crusades-era imperialist desires.

It is necessary, here, to dissect the implications of this East/West binary. The locus of these accounts is essential to understanding their significance. Though the first and longer letter is told from the perspective of the Sultan, the letter itself was written in England and communicates a fantasy of Eastern subjugation. The Sultan’s proposed submission to the King Henry positions England as superior to all other Christian nations. The kingdoms of Christendom that Henry will supposedly rule are listed for an English audience, and, as a result of England’s suggested

superiority, there is a sense of power in the presentation of a vast community perceived to be rightfully submitting to English rule. The “List of Kings” furthers this by reiterating and expanding the list of these subordinated kingdoms. This sense of inherent, Western Christian superiority, among other colonizing desires, drove the crusades. A section of *Mandeville’s Travels* expresses this ideology explicitly when a sultan claims that:

“[Christians] break their entire law that Jesus has given them and set out for their salvation. Thus for their sins they have lost all this land that we [the Saracens] possess, for because their sins your God has put them [the lands] in our hands—not through our strength, but for their sins. For indeed we know truly that when you serve God well and he wants to help you no one can counter you, and so we know well through our prophecies that Christians will win back this land when they serve their God more devoutly. But as long as they are of such a foul life as they are right now, we have no fear of them whatsoever, for their God will not help them at all” (Higgins 87).

The text directly discusses the Christian crusade-era desire to control the Holy Land and, despite the flaws of Christians, their inherent ownership of the lands. Like the first letter in the “Sultan Letters,” this excerpt justifies Western imperialist desires through the voice of an Eastern figure. The letters’ belittlement of Easterners and the way that it is communicated, then, is reminiscent of other contemporary texts.

The focus on subordinating the East relates specifically to the colonizing goals of crusades, and the text constructs the sultan as a well-assimilated, colonizable figure. While “the indigenous colonized were indeed portrayed by England as primitive and even subhuman,” the sultan avoids being wholly dismissed or condemned, like other Saracen characters, through his willingness and

desire to assimilate into Western culture (Heng *Inventions* 37).⁴⁵ This desire for “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha “Mimicry” 126). The colonizing goals and concepts of global Christendom at play during the crusades allow for, and even desire, a certain degree of assimilation and mimicry, especially through religion. This allowed religion, at times, to “[transcend]...ethnic loyalties” (Heng *Inventions* 37). In order for crusaders to take the Holy Lands, they required a certain degree of cooperation from the peoples they sought to conquer. In this case, the sultan’s future conversion and transfer of power and wealth transforms him from a threatening Saracen enemy to something more acceptable. He is still not exactly Western, but he meets enough of the conditions to disqualify him as a threat. This nonthreatening mimicry of Western Christian culture allows him to continue existing within his former space, though it is now conquered by the West. Additionally, the redirection of his immense power and wealth to the service of the king of England furthers the crusades-specific desires of this text. He will convert his kingdom, unite the kingdoms of Christendom, and hand all of these things over to Henry VI, ultimately achieving some of the Western goals of the crusades. The sultan’s exemplary mimicry not only adheres to Western norms, but advances imperialist, crusader objectives. The behavior of the sultan can be understood, then, to represent a well-assimilated Eastern figure according to Western, crusades-influenced standards.

The colonial ideologies are further incorporated into this text through its evocation of the character of Prester John, which also effectively links the letters to a larger network of texts that

⁴⁵ Saracen was often used “to encode a wide range of anxieties loosely tied to race and nation” (Cohen 134). This makes it an especially useful term with regards to the sultan and his daughter. While the “Sultan Letters” never explicitly use the term Saracen, its looseness and the location and religious-status (unconverted, for now) of the sultan and his daughter suggest that they would fall under this category.

express these same ideologies. Prester John, an imaginary Christian emperor of India, was a recognizable and positively-received character around the time that this manuscript was written. In fact, he is directly referenced in f.159rb line 38, in the “List of Kings,” next to the letters’ fictional sultan. The character of Prester John also aligns with the English concept of a perfectly assimilated Eastern Christian. This characterization is in contrast to the more conventional negative perception of figures who fall under the vast category of Saracen, for example the sultan in *Sir Gowther* or Saladin and his army in *Richard Coer de Lyon*. Romance carries a much larger tradition of pitting Saracens against Christians, and, more frequently, “a Saracen chooses death over a newly Christian life” (Cohen 121). The jarring contrast between the cannibalization and murder of poorly assimilated Saracens in *Richard Coer de Lyon* and the acceptance, and even celebration, of figures like MS123’s sultan and Prester John clearly indicate the necessity of Eastern figures’ subjugation and assimilation due to the ideologies associated with the crusades. The sultan and Prester John are a part of a larger network of texts that celebrate the willing conversion and submission of Eastern figures to the powers of the West. Texts like the *King of Tars*, in which a sultan’s skin “that blac and lothely was / Al white bicom thurth Godes gras,” explicitly details the positively-constructed transformative effects of conversion and assimilation into Western culture (Chandler, lines 922-923). Due to the associated texts and their messages, directly linking the language of the sultan in his letter to the *Letter of Prester John* enhances the letters’ communication of imperialist ideologies by placing it within a literary tradition founded on expressing these same ideologies.

One of the major ways that the characters of the sultan and Prester John overlap is through their extreme wealth (of possessions, land, and power). The two characters establish their wealth and power in part through their descriptions of their holdings of land and titles, and their language in

these descriptions have distinct parallels. Prester John claims that he is the “lord of lords and surpass, in all riches which are under heaven, in virtue and in power, all the kings of the wide world” (Uebel 155). He then places himself in “the three Indias” and uses sites of reference such as “the body of St. Thomas the Apostle,” “the place where the sun rises,” and “the tower of Babel” (Uebel 155). It is important to note here that Prester John references sites that carry Christian significance. This especially demonstrates his power through his possession of Christian religious sites, which were particularly significant during the time of the crusades. Similarly to Prester John, the sultan claims that he is “kyng of all kynges, lord of all lordes, Soudon of Surry, Emperour of Babyloun, Steward of Hell, Porter of Paradys, Constabul of Jerusalem, Lord of all Inde, floure of all the werld, and cosyn to Cryst” (f.121r, lines 1-4). The language here already begins to mirror the particular phrasing found in the *Letter of Prester John*. The sultan furthers this description by establishing theoretical boundaries, including “as fer as gres growes or water flowes or foule flyeth or sun schynes,” which continue to emphasize the vastness of his power and parallel the descriptions in the *Letter of Prester John* (f.121r, lines 4-5). Despite the impressiveness of these figure’s power and wealth, there are several factors that prevent them from becoming altogether superior to Western figures. The East, in which these two characters inhabit, “[b]y virtue of its geographical distance and its mythological proximity (in the European Middle Ages, after all, the terrestrial paradise is found in the Orient), [...] represents a space of special freedom and fantasy within the Western imaginary: an exotic locale, safely elsewhere, through which the European here-and-now may transact a variety of imagined relations” (Heng *Empire* 193). The fictional representation of Eastern wealth communicates more so a Western, crusades-era desire to acquire, than a recognition of superiority. Due to their distance and supposed racial inferiority, as well, Prester John and the

sultan's power can exist without posing a real threat to the West. Particularly evoking religious figures and locations works to a similar effect. It bolsters the connection between the East and Christianity that somewhat fueled the crusades in addition to adding to the East's fantastic, desirable wealth. Incorporating wealth and power like Prester John, specifically through the distinctly parallel phrasing, link the character of the sultan to a recognizable manifestation of a crusades-influenced glorification of the East.

Connections between Prester John and the sultan's characters are further developed through their generosity. Amidst his extensive descriptions of wealth and power, Prester John, says to the recipient of his letter: "if there is anything you should desire for your pleasure, make it known to us through our delegate through a small note of your esteem, and you shall have it for the asking" (Uebel 155). The sultan demonstrates comparable generosity when he offers to "make rest and pes in al Crystendom" (f.121r, line 12), provide his daughter as Henry's wife (f.121r, line 7), send "IIII myllyonys of gold" (f. 121r, line 10), and "tho cros that Cryst dyed on on Gode Fryday" (f.121r, line 11). The sultan's offer to peacefully unite the global kingdoms of Christendom and hand over the important Christian relics held in the East continue to reflect some of the driving forces of the crusades. His choice to make these particular offers are a testament to the sultan's assimilation into Western culture, and especially his alignment with crusades ideologies. Prester John and the sultan's immense wealth and generosity also further the exciting, exotic construction of the East in these texts. In the "Sultan Letters," there is more of an emphasis on the sultan's subordination to Henry VI. He claims his ability to unite the kingdoms of Christendom, but defers all power to Henry, inherently establishing Henry's superiority and England's place at the head of Christendom. These factors help to prevent figures like Prester John and the sultan from being portrayed as truly superior to the West.

Glorification of Eastern figures and the East in general, especially when the West is figured as superior, offer a Western audience a sense of pleasure and power as well as promote the crusades. Texts like the *Letter of Prester John* and the “Sultan Letters” include the aforementioned glorification of the East, because it was perceived, by the West, as rightfully belonging to Christians and waiting to be reclaimed. Describing the generosity and submission of these supposedly powerful Eastern figures further develops this sense of pleasure and power. Not only does the sultan reinforce the Western sense of superiority through his submission to Henry VI, but his descriptions of his wealth explain to potential crusaders what they have to gain in the East. Choosing to go fight during the crusades came with the opportunity for “the mobility of place, citizenship, identity, language, sexuality, economic labor, socioeconomic status, religion, memory, and race [theorized] as a multigenerational project articulated in a seductive language of power” (Heng *Inventions* 126). This same perception of opportunity is present in Fulcher of Chartres’ earlier description of the crusades, in which he states, “[f]or those who were poor there, here God makes rich. Those who had few coins, here possess countless bezants; and those who had not had a villa, here, by the gift of God, possess a city. Therefore, why should one who has found the East so favorable return to the West?” (Heng *Inventions* 126). Based off of the descriptions of the East and the crusades in texts, the potential for wealth, power, and ownership is deeply embedded in crusades ideology. Western men saw the opportunity through the Crusades to gain wealth and status, among other things, in ways they were unable to at home, ultimately contributing to the sense of power and pleasure in the glorified presentation of the East that can be seen in the “Sultan Letters” and other crusades romances.

Another way that the “Sultan Letters” link themselves to a network of crusades romances is through the combination of elements of fiction and nonfiction. Generally speaking, “medieval

travel narratives that are neither wholly fictitious, nor wholly factual, [are] a vital and important, if sometimes neglected, species of romance” (Heng *Empire* 5). This intermingling of fact and fiction occurs in several areas of the letters and helps to promote its crusades influenced ideologies. Most obviously, the inclusion of the fictional sultan and historical Henry VI are the starting place for the combination of fact and fiction. The descriptions of their lands, particularly the listing of fictional or theoretical places (e.g. “Steward of Hell” (f.121r, line 2)) and real places (e.g. “Jerusalem” (f.121r, line 3)) together, continue to contribute to these interactions. The intermingling of fiction and nonfiction can also be seen in the *Letter of Prester John* (this can be seen in the aforementioned descriptions of his lands) and other crusades romances, such as *Richard Coer de Lyon* and the *Siege of Jerusalem*, in which historical figures and events are fictionalized. One of the reasons for presenting fact and fiction together in this way, especially with regards to place, is to reinforce the crusades-era desire for and belief in a sense of global Christendom. This “suggest[s] why magicalized accounts of what are very likely rumors retold many times of successful Nestorian missionizing in the East, particularly in “India,” periodically arrive in the West in the guise of charismatic fables and are perceived with more enthusiastic conviction than skepticism” (Heng *Empire* 271). The presentation of the world and incorporation of historical characters into fictional stories in these crusades romances demonstrate this desire well. Choosing to combine elements of fact and fiction in these letters further ties them to romance traditions, and, through the specific romances that it parallels, continues to incorporate crusades ideologies.

The proposed political betrothal of the sultan’s daughter to Henry VI continues the letters’ connections to crusades romance and their associated ideologies, both through its interactions between fact and fiction as well as its continued evocation of Prester John stories. An excerpt of

Mandeville's Travels that discusses Prester John notes that he has “weddeh comunely the doghter of the Gret Chane, and the Gret Chane his doghter”; the “Gret Chane” here is referring to Genghis Khan (Kohanski 2415-2416). Similarly, in the “Sultan Letters,” the sultan proposes a marriage to his daughter as a way to align himself with Henry VI. In both of these texts, there is either the suggestion or completion of a political marriage between fictional and historical figures. While the marriage in the Prester John story only incorporates Eastern figures, the “Sultan Letters,” interestingly, use a political marriage to make ties between the East and West. This relates to the letters’ particular interest in the East/West binary, specifically to the Western desire to be connected to and hold power in the East, while still linking the text to romance traditions.

Through the proposed marriage, the text begins to evoke the Constance romance archetype. Constance is a character type found in medieval romance, including texts such as Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale* and the *King of Tars*. She is typically an Eastern Christian princess who “travels far from her imperial family and homeland” to get married and “[set] in motion a chain of events that culminates in the Christianization of a local populace and the disruption of local families, including the royal family” (Heng *Empire* 181). The daughter from the “Sultan Letters” departs from this character slightly, because she is not yet Christian and would not marry Henry in order to Christianize England. Instead, the letters suggest that she would go to England and marry Henry in order to Christianize herself and her father’s kingdom. Additionally, the daughter never actually does or says anything in the letters themselves; her potential future actions are only alluded to by her father and Henry. Despite these departures, her role as a catalyst for conversion through her future Christianity and strategic marriage allows her to embody a character that still recognizably evokes the Constance archetype. The specific focus on marriage

between Eastern and Western nobility with the goal of Christian conversion was relatively common in crusades romances despite “[having] little historical basis” (Heng *Inventions* 141). One of the potential explanations for this is the function of “interracial, interreligious marriage [...] as “a significant tool in the process of pacification and colonization that took place in the period immediately following the Islamic conquest”” (Heng *Inventions* 141). This helps to clarify the particular attention to marriage and conversion in crusades romances, and why it is incorporated into the popular Constance archetype.

Including a Constance character in the “Sultan Letters” supports their promotion of crusades-influenced ideologies through the role that the daughter is expected to play in the colonization and Christianization of the East. The actions of the Constance type, according to Geraldine Heng, take on a “hagiographic aura” that “makes her feminized crusade over into a kind of sexual martyrdom for Constance” (*Empire* 189). Her actions are equated “to the martyrdom won by crusaders themselves, who are also, like Constance, travelers from their homelands suffering trauma, privation, and distress, in the service of God” (Heng *Empire* 189).

Sexual submission and objectification, particularly through marriage, are constructed as women’s moral duty during the crusades in much the same way as men’s duty to fight. It has been noted by feminist post-colonial theorists “that there would be no ethnic identity without the forced containment and channeling of women’s reproductive capacities along consanguine family and clan lines and that the privileging of ideals of ethnic or national cultural identity conceals internal fissures of gender and sexual domination” (Rivkin 1073). For this reason, the proposed political marriage of the daughter does more than just link her to the Constance type; the strategic betrothal of the daughter expresses an expectation for women during the crusades. It reveals how the objectification and subordination of women, within domestic spheres (i.e.

Western women by Western men) and even more aggressively without (i.e. Eastern women by Western men), are necessary for the processes of colonization and assimilation. In this way, women's roles as bartering chips and objects of desire are roughly equated, in necessity as well as sense of duty, to men's roles as soldiers and active colonizers.

Conversion's significance in the "Sultan Letters" furthers its Western imperialist overtones. The letters place their focus on the conversion of the sultan's kingdom, and how this will contribute to the spread and unification of Christendom. Because of this, the effects of Christian conversion allow it stand in for a lot more than just simple religious conversion. It establishes "religious discourse *as* cultural discourse: announcing, in effect, the arrival and existence of an empire of culture, and the workings of what we might today analogously think of as flows of "cultural imperialism," *translatio imperii*, in the register of romance" (Heng *Empire* 188). The conversion of the sultan's kingdom through the marriage between his daughter and Henry VI essentially achieves the larger goals of the crusades: the Christian conquest of religiously significant Eastern lands. It does so, however, through the less explicitly violent interreligious/interracial marriage that was essential, on a smaller scale, to the proper claiming and assimilation of these Eastern lands and people by the West. The sultan's kingdom's conversion through this marriage also comes with the elimination of "tho that wil not bycom Crysten" (f.121r, lines 8-9). This reflects the crusades era belief that, in order to take the Holy Land, "every good Christian man who is able should exert himself with all his strength to conquer that inheritance [the Holy Land], chase out the misbelievers, and wrest the land out of heathen men's hands" (Heng *Inventions* 136). The daughter's proposed marriage to Henry VI opens a door for mass conversion and, subsequently, the violence against those who refuse to convert. The conversion in the "Sultan Letters," then, is embedded with the importance of

conversion as a tool in order to achieve imperialist goals, such as the assimilation of colonized people and the violence against those who resist assimilation.

The sultan's daughter also promotes the crusades, because she functions as a reminder of yet another thing that Western men have to gain in the East. While the "Sultan Letters" do not venture into the erotic pleasure associated with Eastern women, its parallels with *Mandeville's Travels* and stories of Prester John, which are so deeply and inherently linked with these erotic ideas, recall the already embedded Western cultural perceptions of Eastern women. Travel and crusades romances at times eroticized and exoticized aspects of foreign communities with a particular attention to foreign women. The purpose of exoticism in romance is to "domesticate alterity—dangerous foreignness—by presenting alterity as a panorama of colorful, collectible particulars: marvels and curiosities that superficially signal foreignness while being shorn of risk, and that are reducible, in status, to the fascination of delightful souvenirs. Unlike the truly foreign, the exotic is designed to impart pleasure, to thrill, but conventionally: foreignness is packaged and tamed into pleasurable, exciting artifacts for markets of domestic consumption" (Heng *Empire* 284).

Much like the aforementioned descriptions of the wealth and cooperation of Prester John and the sultan, the objectification of Eastern women makes them desirable and enjoyable to a Western audience. *Mandeville's Travels* specifically delves into the details of "[n]aked, beautiful women, harems and multiple wives, Amazons and fatal virgins [...] because they are such effortlessly accessible, and conventional, placeholders for the forbidden pleasures afforded by the virtual worlds of travel narratives" (Heng *Empire* 241). As a highly influential and widely-read text, the perceptions of the world offered in *Mandeville's Travels* thoroughly permeate the perception of foreign peoples. Saracens in particular "were said to be predisposed toward licentiousness"

(Cohen 125). Thus, even the brief inclusion of the daughter character, specifically in the context of marriage to an English king, involves tantalizing ideas about the sexuality of Eastern women for an audience of Westerners. Much like the fantasized-about wealth and lands of the East, the daughter becomes an imagined, exoticized, object of imperialist English desire.

The imperialist desires presented in the “Sultan Letters” are enhanced by the presentation of the world in f.158r-159v’s “List of Kings.” The “Sultan Letters” establish a sense of global Christendom with England and France at the head. The “List of Kings” attaches itself to the “Sultan Letters” through its reference to the same unnamed “soudon” (f.159rb, line 40) and its reference to the list of eighteen “kynges of all Crystendom” (f.158va), which corresponds with the sultan’s reference to the “XVIII kynges” (f.121r, line 13). Listing eighteen kingdoms of Christendom appears to be manuscript specific, as I have not been able to locate it elsewhere. The specificity of this reference, then, further connects these passages to one another. The sultan specifically lists eighteen countries, sixteen of which are included between the two lists in the “List of Kings.” The two excluded kingdoms are “Cateloun” (Catalonia) and “Wyffiall” (unknown) (f.121r, line 15). Despite the two exclusions, the number of names that overlap paired with repetition of a list of eighteen Christian kingdoms serves as enough to consider the “List of Kings” a text intentionally connected to the “Sultan Letters.” These parallels link the “List of Kings” to the letters’ more explicitly addressed English imperialist ideologies. As a result, the “List of Kings” expands the letters’ imperialist and Western-centric concepts of the world without having to create a narrative in order to reiterate the ideology. The first two kingdoms of Christendom listed in the “List of Kings” are France and England, which have already been established as the primary realms of Henry VI in the “Sultan Letters.” While there does not appear to be any particular order to the list, placing these two countries at the top does

suggest that they are the starting place when listing kingdoms of Christendom. This sort of subtle positioning of the West allows the list to build upon the ideas presented in the “Sultan Letters.” Due to all of these parallels, it is necessary to look at the “List of Kings” as a supplement to the “Sultan Letters” (rather than as a standalone piece) in order to retain the list’s imperialist implications.

The “List of Kings”’s focus on heraldry works to evoke a sense of nationalistic pride and the expanse of a global empire. This text begins by plainly listing eighteen Christian kings in a single column, and this list is followed by a more detailed list of kings, emperors, and a sultan and their heraldic symbols. While these two lists largely overlap, there are a few discrepancies that I am unable to account for.⁴⁶ The listing of kings and their heraldic symbols is significant, because they function “[a]s a figure to express the overarching cohesion of the communal whole[;] the identity of a medieval geopolitical collectivity is crucially invoked by symbolic kingship—as the identity of the modern republican nation today might be invoked in flag or national anthem” (Heng *Empire* 66). Listing England and France and describing their kings’ recognizable coats of arms work, on one hand, to evoke a sense of familiarity and nationalistic identity. Physically listing the names of kingdoms below France and England as well as describing the heraldic symbols of other kingdoms, encourages a similar sense of power and pleasure as the “Sultan Letters.” Because the superiority of the West, specifically England and France, has already been established, seeing the other subordinated kingdoms of Christendom provides a somewhat tangible sense of power through its suggestion of the vastness of Western-dominated Christendom. In this list, like in the letters, the Eastern world is being presented for

⁴⁶ The heraldic symbols are provided for all eighteen of the kings of Christendom. The heraldic symbols are provided for “Rome,” “Grece” (Greece), “Trapassonde” (unknown), “Sauastopolo” (unknown), “Sardeyn” (Sardinia), “Ynde” (India), and the kingdom of the sultan, though these are not included in the list of eighteen.

the consumption and pleasure of a Western audience. Describing the heraldic symbols, then, contributes to the pleasure of reading about the world, as they are details about the national identities of these widespread kingdoms that were significant during the time that this text was written. The presentation of the kingdoms of Christendom and their heraldic symbols help to foster a sense of Western national identity and pride through the same sense of power and pleasure present in the “Sultan Letters” and the romances that it draws on.

In addition to the sense of power and pleasure, the “List of Kings” also incorporates and enhances the “Sultan Letters” intermingling of fact and fiction. The vast majority of the details included in the “List of Kings” are accurate; most of the kingdoms exist and many of their coats of arms are correct. There are, however, several fictional elements within this largely factual text. Most significantly, the list of heraldic symbols concludes with Prester John and the fictional sultan. It is worth noting that, despite the fact that Prester John is a fictional character, he has various coats of arms associated with him and the list describes one of them accurately.⁴⁷ The sultan, however, does not appear to reference any particular well-known character or historical figure, so his coat of arms is likely invented for this description only. These two mythical Eastern figures are listed alongside accurate descriptions of kingdoms’ coats of arms, blending elements of fact and fiction. The inclusion of the sultan and Prester John in this largely factual list gives the “Sultan Letters” authority, enhancing the sense of power and pleasure of the Western readers. By suggesting that the letters are based on fact, the writer suggests the reality of the superiority of Henry VI, and the West, and the inferiority of the sultan, who stands in for the East. Specifically including the figure of Prester John in the “List of Kings” also further

⁴⁷ This particular coat of arms is attested to in a much later text, *Heraldic Notices of Canterbury Cathedral* by Thomas Willement.

highlights the deliberate parallels that the “Sultan Letters” create. The sultan emulates Prester John, who is a legendarily perfect example of Eastern mimicry of Western Christian culture. This removes the ambiguity for the reader when it comes to how the sultan should be understood. Because he is so pointedly linked to Prester John, the reader understands that the sultan is a positive figure. The actions of the sultan can carry more influence as a result, because the reader does not have to wonder whether or not he offers a good example or promotes ideas in the West’s best interest. The incorporation of these fictional elements into a largely nonfictional piece ultimately function to help the “List of Kings” and the “Sultan Letters” more successfully promote English imperialist ideologies.

Considering MS123’s the “Sultan Letters” and the “List of Kings” together and in conjunction with the form and tropes of crusades romance allows for a reading that highlights the deeply embedded, crusades-influenced imperialist ideologies present in the manuscript. Both texts incorporate a version of the world by and for the West; one that is characteristic of medieval romance and heavily influenced by the strong imperialist ideologies present during the crusades. The two texts evoke the character of Prester John, which directly links them to crusades romance, ideas about desirable Eastern assimilation, and the glorification of the East. Additionally, the inclusion of Prester John and elements reminiscent of his letter help to establish the fictional/nonfictional quality of these works that help to further the perpetuation of crusades ideologies. The daughter from the “Sultan Letters” reinforces the connection to crusades romance through her links to the Constance character. The Constance character reinforces the text’s imperialist ideologies and demonstrates how they intersect with gender. She reveals the role of women in the world of colonization: as a form of currency in the political affairs of men and tools necessary for proper colonization and cultural assimilation. The presentation of the

world in the “List of Kings” through the inclusion of heraldic symbols and lists expands the sense of power and pleasure in the “Sultan Letters,” continuing to ingrain the imperialist ideologies within these texts. The evocation of common tropes from contemporary crusades romance helps these texts to better and more clearly present their messages to a Western medieval audience. Though the crusades are not the origin of these imperialist desire, they renewed the vigor with which these ideologies were promoted and pursued, and this was reflected in contemporary literature. Because the “Sultan Letters” and the “List of Kings” so clearly draw on crusades romance tropes, they become particularly good examples of recognizable and conventional expressions of crusades-era thoughts. For this reason, these texts are important to understanding the construction, communication, and circulation of crusades ideologies.

Despite the crusades-specific manifestation of these harmful imperialist ideas, the very same things still impact the world today. Due to the era’s proximity to the crusades, the communication of these ideologies are highly influenced by the language and events associated with the crusades. This, paired with the language and symbolism of the Middle Ages, can make the ideas presented in these texts seem distant from modern day. The meanings in the “Sultan Letters” and the “List of Kings,” though they are not so different from the forces driving more recent colonization, seem distant because they are so deeply coded in the literary conventions of the time period. The sense of disconnect is widened by the era’s seeming distance from the present. The Middle Ages is often perceived as an era preceding “a Scientific Revolution, discoveries of race, the formation of nations, etc.—which signal the arrival of modern time. [...] [M]edieval time is then absolved of the errors and atrocities of the modern, while its own errors and atrocities are shunted aside as essentially nonsignificative, without *modern* meaning” (Heng

Inventions 20-21). This belief allows for the dismissal of issues as they are communicated in medieval texts, despite the fact that these very issues are the precursors to modern day manifestations of prejudice. Because prejudices evolve with time, it can be more difficult to recognize the prejudices of our own time as opposed to the more obviously condemnable manifestations of the past. For this reason, acknowledging the direct connections of medieval manifestations of prejudices to those of the modern day can be particularly useful in reducing their acceptability.

The particular prejudices present in these two texts did not start or end in the crusades, and essentially the same loose categories of West (Us) and East (Them) still govern international and interpersonal relations today. This particular prejudice is most prominently seen in the islamophobia of the United States and Europe. In the same way that the term Saracen was used to describe an Eastern Other, blending boundaries of race and religion, during the Middle Ages, “[d]efinitions of race in practice today at airport security checkpoints, in the news media, and in public political discourse flaunt ethnoracial categories decided on the basis of religious identity (“Muslims” being grouped as a de facto race), national or geopolitical origin (“Middle Easterners”), or membership in a linguistic community (Arabic-speakers standing in for Arabs)” (Heng *Inventions* 20). In a remarkably similar way to the Middle Ages, prejudices directed toward the loosely categorized East continue to permeate the European and American (the modern day West) psyches and impact the lives of peoples who now fall under this category of Eastern. George W. Bush troublingly invoked this during his post-9/11 address, during which he said, “[t]his crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take a while” (Holsinger 6). Bush’s evocation of the crusades implies a disturbing continuation of and identification with the ideologies of the crusades in the United States. This same West versus East, Us versus Them

drives European and North American Islamophobia, and the crusades remain largely uncriticized and even praiseworthy. In order to move away from the continued perpetuation of these prejudices, the history of their damage, which can be revealed through texts like the “Sultan Letters” and the “List of Kings,” need to be examined more thoroughly and openly. Studying the foundation and impact of these prejudices could potentially lead to a better understanding and, thus, greater pushback against their modern-day perpetuation.

CHAPTER 2

Folio 131 verso

Mensful⁴⁸ and myghty in mynde
 Modyr of Maries III⁴⁹
 Comen of kynges kynde
 Curtas⁵⁰ and comly⁵¹ to se
 5 In fastyng⁵² faythful to fynde
 Helpar folies to fle
 Our bytter bondys to unbynde
 Fro bale⁵³ our baner⁵⁴ sche be
 and bote⁵⁵
 10 Be hir spekes Ysay⁵⁶
 And says in his prophecy
 A yerd⁵⁷ schal spryng ful hy
 Of Jesses rote
 Lystes and lere⁵⁸ of hir lyf

⁴⁸ Honorable

⁴⁹ Referring to Saint Anne

⁵⁰ Courteous or courtly

⁵¹ Beautiful

⁵² Manuscript reads “frastyng.” I have chosen to omit the “r” for clarity.

⁵³ Suffering

⁵⁴ Representative/supporter (like a military banner)

⁵⁵ Salvation

⁵⁶ Isaiah

⁵⁷ Branch; in this context, it is referencing descent from the Tree of Jesse.

⁵⁸ Listen and learn

- 15 How lely⁵⁹ scho levyd in this lede⁶⁰
 Tho fyrst man that wroght hyr to wife
 Was Joachym⁶¹ worthi in wede⁶²
 Barayn and steyned in stryf
 That berd was ryght as we rede
- 20 Hir sorow hyr syghyng was ryfe⁶³
 And Joachym dwellyd in drede
 ryght than
 An angel of hevyn
 [Sta]nd⁶⁴ in his stevyn⁶⁵
- 25 [She]⁶⁶ schil concayf ful evyn
 The modyr of God and man

Anna solet dici tres concepisce Marias⁶⁷

Quas genuere viri Jochim Cleophas Salome que

Has duxere viri Josep Alphele Zebedens⁶⁸

⁵⁹ Sincerely, faithfully

⁶⁰ Way

⁶¹ Joachim, husband of Saint Anne and father of the Virgin Mary

⁶² Garb

⁶³ Abundant

⁶⁴ Word partially missing. According to the Middle English Dictionary's entry for "steven(e)," the word "stevyn" is commonly paired with a version of the word "stand" in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Due to the context I have chosen to use it as a substitute.

⁶⁵ Command

⁶⁶ Word missing, substitution

⁶⁷ The following three lines of verse are taken almost exactly from *The Golden Legend* (Jacobus 536). Differences include minor differences in the spellings of names and the misspelling of *concepisse* as *concepisce*.

⁶⁸ Anna is commonly said to have conceived the three Marys / Whom the men, Joachim, Cleopas, and Salome, beget / These Marys made husbands of Joseph, Alpheus, and Zebedee

Folio 132 recto

- Sone⁶⁹ so the bodes⁷⁰ were broght
 Scho comfort and covyrd of care
 Smertly⁷¹ that semly scho soght
 30 Joachym to wit where he ware
 Joachym joy was wroght
 Thurgh the angel he felt of that fare⁷²
 Bothere ther blys were boght
 Thay met at a gate ful yare⁷³
 35 to telle
 Be hym scho consayved a fode⁷⁴
 A mayden myldest of mode
 Mary⁷⁵ gracios and gode
 Emperes of Helle
 40 Josef⁷⁶ weddyd that wyght⁷⁷
 Werthy in werd for to mete⁷⁸

⁶⁹ Immediately

⁷⁰ Commands

⁷¹ Swiftly

⁷² Proceedings?

⁷³ Eagerly

⁷⁴ Baby

⁷⁵ The Virgin Mary

⁷⁶ Saint Joseph, husband of the Virgin Mary

⁷⁷ Woman

⁷⁸ According to fate

Gabriel⁷⁹ on kne gon hym dyght
 With aue he halsed⁸⁰ that swete
 And moned⁸¹ to that mayden of myght
 45 Ful selcowth sawes and set
 “God the within schal light
 Our bytter balis⁸² to bete⁸³
 I wys⁸⁴
 A barn⁸⁵ of the schal be borne
 50 And thu mayden as be forn
 To safe that is for lorn
 And bryng tham to blys”

 Lefe we this lufly on lere⁸⁶
 Of hyr modyr mowthe⁸⁷ we mare
 55 Cleophas⁸⁸ scho caght tyl hir fere⁸⁹
 And lely⁹⁰ list at hir lare⁹¹
 Betwyx tham to that were dere

⁷⁹ Angel Gabriel

⁸⁰ Beseeched

⁸¹ Urged

⁸² Sins

⁸³ Remedy

⁸⁴ Certainly

⁸⁵ Baby

⁸⁶ Beautiful face

⁸⁷ Speak

⁸⁸ Cleopas, brother of Joseph and Saint Anne’s second husband

⁸⁹ Husband

⁹⁰ Virtuously

⁹¹ Consummated her desire

- A doghter was yarked⁹² ful yare⁹³
- The whilk with awtyn any were
- 60 The name Mary Cleophe⁹⁴ bare
- wit skylle
- That second Mary tyl hir make
- Alphe⁹⁵ gun sche take
- And levyd withowtyn wrake⁹⁶
- 65 As it was gode skylle
- Some scho left at his lore⁹⁷
- IIII sonys in hir body sche bred
- Whilk IIII sonys ever more
- Tho lawe of owre Lord thay led
- 70 Les Jame⁹⁸ ferd before
- The fyrst that scho fosterd and fed
- Other III worthy ther wore
- As klerkys has rekkynd and led
- Til us
- 75 Symon and also Judas⁹⁹

⁹² Made

⁹³ Well

⁹⁴ Mary Cleopas, Saint Anne's second daughter named Mary

⁹⁵ Alpheus, husband of Mary Cleopas

⁹⁶ Evil

⁹⁷ Decree

⁹⁸ Saint James the Lesser, an apostle and son of Alpheus and Mary Cleopas

⁹⁹ Both sons of Alpheus and Mary Cleopas

Joseph tho whilk Barsabas¹⁰⁰

These IIII folwed the trace

Of ther cosyn Jhesus

Prima parit XIII Jacobus secunda minozen¹⁰¹

Et Josep Justus peperit cum Simone Judam

Tercia Majorem Jacobus volucrem que Johennem

Ascalonita necat pueros Antipa Johennem

Agrippa Jacobum etaudens in carcere Petrum¹⁰²

Folio 132 verso

Ryghtly to rekkyn in rese

80 Of this modyr more mot I fond

Tho thryd tyme a lord scho ches

Salome to be hir husbond

Lely withowtyn any les

Scho levyd be tho lawes of tho lond

85 And conseyyed a mayden of pes

¹⁰⁰ Joseph Barsabbas or Joseph the Just, another son of Alpheus and Mary Cleopas

¹⁰¹ These lines of verse are taken almost exactly from the *Golden Legend*. In the *Golden Legend*, lines 46-48 follow lines 15-17. Lines 49 and 50 appear in an earlier section titled "The Holy Innocents" (de Voragine 56). The lines differ only in minor spelling mistakes and slight changes to the spellings of names.

¹⁰² The first [Mary] begot XIII, the second Jacob [or James] the Less / And Joseph the Just she begot alongside Simon and Juda / The third Jacob [or James] the Greater and John the Winged / [Herod of] Ascalon kills the boys, [Herod] Antipas [kills] John [the Baptist] / [Herod] Agrippa [kills] Jacob [or James the Greater] and challenges Peter with prison

Graciously thurgh sond
 of Cryst
 Was called Mary Salome¹⁰³
 Wedded unto Zebede¹⁰⁴
 90 More Jame¹⁰⁵ conceyved sche
 And Jon Evangelist

 Raply rase¹⁰⁶ we this rote
 The braunch be born opon hy
 And speke of hir syster we mote
 95 That hend scho hyght Emery
 Abyathar¹⁰⁷ that swot wrought
 Hir to wyfe worthely
 Elizabeth to bote
 Scho bar wyfe to Zachary
 100 ful trist¹⁰⁸
 Scho was baran but at tho last
 Zachary hyr knew in hast
 And scho consayved ful fast

¹⁰³ Mary Salome, a disciple of Jesus who was present at the crucifixion and daughter of Saint Anne and Salome

¹⁰⁴ Zebedee, husband of Mary Salome

¹⁰⁵ Saint James the Greater, son of Mary Salome and Zebedee

¹⁰⁶ Quickly raise

¹⁰⁷ Abiather, the Jewish high priest that killed James the Greater

¹⁰⁸ Despite its absence in the manuscript, a space has been added between these two words for clarity.

Jon tho Baptist

explicit stirps Anne beate¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Here ends the lineage of St. Anne

Religious Revolutions: Vernacularization and Women

MS 123's f.131v to 132v (referred to as "Modyr of Maries III" from here on)¹¹⁰ contains 104 lines of English verse detailing the lineage of Saint Anne and her three daughters named Mary. In addition to the English verse, there are eight lines of Latin verse from the *Golden Legend* written in the lower margins of f.131v and 132r, though these are not meant to be read as lines of the poem. Preceding the English verses is a family tree, which visually demonstrates the lineage explained in the poem. The English verses, for their form, content, and context, may be read as a vernacular, poetic sermon characteristic of the fifteenth century as well as tie them to various contemporary religious movements. The poem is written in a simple rhyming and alliterative bob and wheel, similar to other vernacularized sermons of the time. Its focus on women and births reflect the shift in beliefs about women's place within Christianity, led by religious women such as Julian of Norwich. Their relationship to gender was not the only way that they connected to contemporary religious shifts. Being both a vernacular and a religious text during at this time links them to Wyclif, the lollards, and their desire to vernacularize religious texts, though this relationship is complex. Looking at these verses and their relationship with vernacular poetic sermons demonstrates their relationship with language and religious developments of the fifteenth century.

The family tree at the top of f.131v establishes a focus on women that is carried throughout the rest of the poem. This diagram sacrifices consistency and clarity for a visual emphasis on women. Anne features as the head of this tree, with her three husbands branching out from her. For every other woman, a husband is represented by attaching connecting a bubble

¹¹⁰ Though, conventionally, the title would come from the first line of the poem, I have chosen to refer to it by the second line due to the first line's lack of distinctiveness.

to the wife's name. The irregularity in the presentation of Anne's husbands highlights her as the foundation, focus, and most significant member of this family tree. This particular choice also coordinates with the manner in which the poem presents the lineage. The location of the other family lines and the placement of the husbands enforce the matriarchal emphasis that Anne's location creates. Children stem directly from the mothers, suggesting that this family tree follows births as opposed to just family lines. Because the husbands' bubbles attach directly to their respective Mary and lines with their children's bubbles connect only to the mothers, there becomes a strict focus on women's lineage, specifically the daughters of Saint Anne and their children. The little interest given to the husbands revolves around their role in the daughters' lives and the children that they help to produce. The family tree reiterates the focus on women present throughout the poem.

The English verse is written in bob and wheel, but this form is collapsed likely in order to conserve space in the manuscript. The poem's rhyme scheme and line breaks are indicated by markings in the manuscript, namely brackets. The stanzas are broken up into quatrains and tercets, each with their own set of brackets. Paired with each quatrain is the bob and with each tercet, a wheel of four to seven syllables. A separate bracket connects the bob and wheel, acknowledging their rhyme. Each line of the quatrain contains two lines of the poem, and a punctus signifies the line break. This breaks the quatrains into eight lines with a rhyme scheme of *abab*, followed by the bob. A rhyming tercet goes below the bob and is followed by the wheel. Once it is fully expanded, the poem has a rhyme scheme of *abababab c ddd c*. In addition to rhyming, the poem is also metrical and alliterative. The lines, excluding the bobs and wheels, contain between six and nine syllables. The wheels fall around four to six syllables, and the bobs are consistently made up of two syllables. Most every long line in the poem is

alliterative, generally excluding the bobs and wheels. Within the first seventeen lines of the poem, there appears to be an attempt to create more complex alliterative scheme: pairs of matching, alliterative lines within the first eight lines (the bob coordinating with lines seven and eight) and a fully coordinated final four lines (the bracketed tercet including the marginal wheel). This continues into the first four lines of the following stanza, but the author does not follow it through to the end of poem. Acknowledging and examining the form of this poem helps to reinforce its place within texts of the fifteenth century, as its form, including its alliteration, meter, and rhyme scheme, is characteristic of contemporary English poetry.

The poetic form and use of brackets and marginal notes to highlight this form are consistent with other roughly contemporary texts. Many other Middle English poems use bob and wheel, including *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Pearl*. Its apparently wide usage indicates that this would have been a recognizable form for audiences. The use of brackets in order to explain a rhyme scheme or condense a poem in order to save page space appears to be common as well. Harley MS 2253, a miscellany dated only slightly earlier than Aberdeen's MS 123, contains similarly bracketed verse in the "Lament for Simon de Montfort." Though these verses are in French and not a bob and wheel, they use brackets to indicate rhyming quatrains and marginal lines to be inserted at the ends of each quatrain. The particular employment of the brackets in these manuscripts, and many others, demonstrate "the eagerness of many medieval scribes to indicate the exact verse form of the texts they were copying—via lineation, brackets, and other aspects of layout—which suggests the importance they attached to recognising verse form" (Purdie 13). The form and presentation of "Modyr of Maries III," then, appears to be consistent with other contemporary poems.

Despite the fact that these verses are written in a way to draw attention to their recognizable poetic form, they are not technically very complex or creative. That is to say, that these verses, while following a form, do not demonstrate a particularly artful or impressive use of language. The basic language could be reflective of shifts towards vernacularity in religious spheres taking place during this time period. English verse was becoming more and more common for sermon writing, but, until those writing the sermons could better refine their language and skills, the poetry used in sermons remained fairly basic. Notably, the text frequently makes use of filler phrases in order to adhere to the rhyme scheme. For example, phrases like “ryght than” (line 22) and “I wys” (line 48), which add nothing to the story, serve exclusively to maintain the rhyme. Its lack of complexity lends to the interpretation of this poem as sermon. Though there was an effort at this time to incorporate poetics forms in sermons in order to make them more engaging,

“they can hardly be called works of great verbal art. It would seem that the formal constraints set for them by their Latin models, as well as their sermon function, work against any display of poetic skills that might endow them with lively diction, imagery, rhetorical figures, and the like [...] These rhymed divisions are versified prose rather than genuine poems” (Wenzel “Sermon,” 99).

“Modyr of Maries III”’s largely uncomplicated employment of a popular poetic form matches that which can be seen in vernacularized and versified sermons of roughly the same time period.

Not only is the poem recognizable for its form, but for its content which derives from the *Golden Legend* as well. Much like the *Golden Legend*’s section entitled “The Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary,” the verses are primarily concerned with tracing the lineage of Saint Anne, though they omit certain details present in this chapter as well as include outside information.

Both “Modyr of Maries III” and “The Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary” discuss Anne’s marriages to Joachim, Cleopas, and Salome, the conception of Anne’s three daughter’s name Mary, the marriages of each of the three Marys, the children of the Marys and their husbands, and the children of Elizabeth and Zebedee. These overlaps make up the bulk of the poem’s content. The *Golden Legend* includes significantly more information about the Virgin Mary’s life, including the miracles she performs as a saint, and the extended lineage of several figures, namely Joachim. The omission of these moments from “Modyr of Maries III” functions primarily to streamline the narrative, offering a more succinct version of this story. Instead of focusing on the history of or detailed information about the members of this family, the poem prioritizes female figures, relations to saints, and births.

The Latin verses included in the lower margins of these pages are taken almost directly from the *Golden Legend*. Despite their relation to the content of the English verses, however, the Latin verses appear to be an addition to the folios as opposed to a part of the poem itself. N. R. Ker, in *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, records the Latin verses as “additions at the foot of the pages” (9). In addition to this claim, there are several other factors that suggest that these verses are marginal notes. Most immediately, the ink appears to be a lighter brown than the ink used for the English lines, and these lines do not include rubrication. The hand appears to be similar and the verses are bracketed in a way that is visually similar to the English lines, but there are inconsistencies. Notably, there is a difference in the way that the *i*’s have been dotted, and the *r*’s are squatter than those in the English material. The hand is also noticeably sloppier than that of the English verses. In order to maintain the format of the English verses, seven lines and two marginal phrases must remain together, leaving large margins on f.131v and 132r. The Latin verses have been inserted into these leftover spaces, and, as a result of having to fit into

this space, the hand is sloppier and the lines do not have room to be separated according to their respective chapters. Because of this, the first three lines of verse from “The Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary” appear on f.131v, and the final three appear with the lines from “The Holy Innocents” on f.132r. The verses from “The Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary” misuse the brackets employed throughout the English verses. Consistently used to indicate rhyme, this pattern is only broken by these first six lines of Latin. The only two lines to come from “The Holy Innocents,” and the final two lines of Latin, employ a different style of bracket, indicating that they are from a different source. This particular style of bracket (containing a loop instead of a hard edge) is used one other time on f.132v to connect “ful trist” (line 99) to “Jon tho Baptist” (line 103), though it is used in accordance with the rest of the brackets. It is possible that a reader could have noticed a missing bracket and added it in later, in a different style or that the original scribe drew this bracket in a different style, either intentionally or unintentionally. Because I do not have a way to properly test the ink, I can only argue that, based on the context and usage of this particular bracket, that its inconsistencies do not appear to affect the meaning of these lines, the Latin, or the poem as a whole.

The Latin additions directly link the verses to certain sections of the *Golden Legend*, including “The Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary” and “The Holy Innocents,” but the English verses include aspects of saint’s lives written in other sections of the *Golden Legend*. Notably, the name “Abyather” appears on line 95 of the poem. Though “The Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary” excludes it, it appears in another chapter of the *Golden Legend* entitled “Saint James the Greater.” According to this chapter, Abiathar was a Jewish high priest who “incited an uprising among the people, then put a rope around [James the Greater]’s neck and had him brought before Herod Agrippa. At Herod’s command he was led away to be beheaded” (Jacobus 391). James

the Greater is the son of Mary Salome and Zebedee, making him the grandson of Anne and her third husband, Salome, and all of these figures appear in the English verses. The inclusion of Abiathar is one of the few moments when the verses deviate from their strict focus on Anne, her daughters, and births. This inclusion is significant, because the death of James at the hands of Abiathar leads to James becoming a saint. “The Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary” specifically “[notes] that the Church solemnizes only three birthdays, namely, those of Christ, of holy Mary, and of John the Baptist” (Jacobus 540). For these three figures, the poem focuses on their births. Saint James the Great is the one figure whose death is mentioned within this poem, and it is actually his martyrdom that makes him a saint. It appears, then, that the verses also have an interest in highlighting the religious importance, specifically sainthood, of this family. This interest is further enforced by another brief departure from Anne and her daughters to include Elizabeth, Zachary, and their child, John the Baptist. Though “The Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary” includes these three figures, they are a detour from the verses’ detailing of mostly direct lineage. The inclusion of less directly related figures like John the Baptist and the inclusion of Abiathar, who is not present in the chapter where the bulk of the information in these verses are derived, demonstrate an interest in highlighting religiously important members of Anne’s family, thus emphasizing the impressiveness of their lineage.

“Modyr of Maries III” includes references to the Tree of Jesse that do not appear in “The Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary,” which further highlights the prestige of this family. Stanza one concludes with: “And says in his prophecy / A yerd schal spryng ful hy / Of Jesses rote” (lines 11-13). Line 11’s prophecy likely refers to Isaiah 11, which begins “a shoot will spring up from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit” (11:1). Isaiah 11:10 also claims that “the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples.” The poem employs similar

language earlier in the first stanza, when it claims that “Fro bale our baner sche be” (line 8).

Through both explicit references and textual parallels, the verses clearly link themselves to this lineage. The significance of references to the Tree of Jesse has “not varied since the time of St. Jerome. ‘The patriarch Jesse,’ wrote the monk Hervsus in the twelfth century, ‘belonged to the royal family, that is why the root of Jesse signifies the lineage of kings. As to the rod, it symbolises Mary as the flower symbolises Jesus Christ’” (Mâle 165). In this way, referencing the Tree of Jesse continues to emphasize the importance of the members of this family, much like the aforementioned focus on sainthood, though in a way that caters to the cultural value placed on lineage.

Referencing the Tree of Jesse also helps to align this family tree with medieval societal values, which placed a great amount stock in good lineage. The Tree of Jesse represents a lineage stemming from kings. Focusing on tracing the lineage of Anne, especially considering the specific figures that the author chooses to include in “Modyr of Maries III,” helps to enhance the Tree of Jesse’s effect, as the text specifically focuses on religiously important members Anne’s family. Focusing on the sainthood of many members of this family and incorporating the Tree of Jesse into this poem contribute to “[t]he idea of the holy family as a large and powerful kinship” (Reames). By discussing almost exclusively the powerful and religiously significant members of this family and skimming over the other, less influential members, the poem suggests the importance of bolstering a strong and well-known bloodline, especially due to that fact that this is, ultimately, Christ’s bloodline. This “had another advantage in medieval culture, of course, because it conformed so well with that culture’s assumptions about family and class” (Reames). A Christ born of nobility both highlighted his own importance, even outside of religion, as well as aligned with this medieval understanding of class. Presenting Christ as a

noble figure would help to justify and maintain the class balance that existed in fifteenth century England, one that was partially upheld by and beneficial to the church.

The focus on female lineage continues to develop this interest in Christ's lineage evoked by the Tree of Jesse. By focusing on the women, the poem more directly traces the lineage of Christ, and this is supported by the poem's links to the *Golden Legend*, specifically "The Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary." The beginning of this section explains that "Matthew and Luke do not set forth the lineage of Mary but that of Joseph—who had nothing to do with the conception of Christ—because the usage of the sacred writers is said to have been to weave the series of generations of males, not females" (Jacobus 535). This detail is significant enough that it also makes it into Caxton's 1485 English translation of the *Golden Legend*. This consideration in deciding how to present the lineage of Mary exists outside of versions of the *Golden Legend* as well. The works of John Mirk and Osbern Bokenham, two religious writers from roughly the same time as "Modyr of Maries III," grapple with this same issue. Mirk, in his "Sermon on the Conception of the Virgin Mary," chooses to give Anne "less attention than Joachim [...] in the narrative leading up to Mary's birth" (Reames). Bokenham, in his "Life of St. Anne," however, "shows much more interest in Anne's own character and virtues, and in her human experience" (Reames). Despite the usually patriarchal approach to the lineage, there are instances of authors showing an interest in Anne specifically. "Modyr of Maries III" also chooses to follow the lineage as it occurs through women, as it traces a family history exclusively through conceptions and births. Directly following the line of Anne and her three daughters, as opposed to focusing on the line of Joseph or Joachim, responds to the aforementioned excerpt from the *Golden Legend* and chooses to trace the lineage of Christ more directly than through his male family members. While Jesus is not explicitly the focus of the family tree or poem in this manuscript,

his relation to the figures is the reason that they are being written about. The poem maintains this focus on the lineage of Christ by including lines that remind the reader of his relevance periodically throughout. After listing the children of Mary Salome, for example, the stanza concludes by noting that they “folwed the trace / Of ther cosyn Jhesus,” reminding the reader of the reason for listing these figures (lines 76-77). Focusing on the female members of this family allows the verses to more directly trace the lineage of Christ and certain details of these verses serve as reminders of this.

The poem shifts the focus from men to women in part to more accurately trace the lineage of Christ, but this focus on women also reflects a shifting interest in women in religion present in England at the time when this poem was written. Some of which being a shift in interest towards Anne and the increasing place for women within religion and the church. It is important to note that this does not mean that women’s roles in the church directly expanded; for example, women were not all of a sudden allowed to preach. Instead the interest in women like Anne gave women, specifically married women, a better way to connect with their religion by identifying the roles that women were already filling in medieval society within religious texts and celebrating them. In the fourteenth century, “at least five important English monastic foundations were also claiming to have relics of Anne, and dozens of additional shrines, altars, and chapels had been dedicated to her, both in England and on the Continent” (Reames). This interest continued to grow into the sixteenth century, by which point “there were at least 40 medieval churches and chapels under her patronage in England, the majority of which had been dedicated or rededicated to her during the previous two centuries” (Reames). “Modyr of Maries III” falls in the middle of this spike in the cult of Anne. The fifteenth century also carried with it a theological interest in the place of women within Christianity, specifically through the

identification of women with Christ and vice versa. For example, Julian of Norwich, another contemporary figure, claims that “God is our mother as truly as he is our father” (Julian 139). She, paired with the many other religious women identifying with Christ through motherhood, effectively expanded the place of women within Christianity. Anne offered something similar to everyday medieval women. She “represented an attractive alternative to the standard equation of female saintliness with virginity, persecution, and early death” for women who had little to no options outside of marrying and raising a family (Reames). Anne presented laywomen with a version of their lives that was seen as equal to those of martyrs and virgins instead of inferior to them, encouraging everyday medieval women to see their lives in alignment with Christian values and ideals. The poem’s focus on Saint Anne and the lineage of her daughters with a focus on births reflect the era’s growing interest in creating a place for laywomen’s in Christianity.

Incorporating the somewhat controversial trinubium theory also contributes to the significance of this poem within the scope of women and their relationship with religion. The trinubium theory is the understanding of Anne’s family tree as it is expressed in “Modyr of Maries III,” in which she marries three times. From the twelfth century onwards the trinubium theory was challenged by theologians “who felt that multiple marriages and additional children were incompatible with the purity and holiness that must have characterized the Virgin’s mother, and some Biblical scholars rejected it on the grounds that it depended on misinterpretations of particular names and details” (Reames). Despite the controversy surrounding this theory, it was present in both de Voragine’s original and Caxton’s English translation of the *Golden Legend*, which were respected and authoritative works. While the “The Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary” intermittently acknowledges that certain aspects of this lineage are speculative—such as whether or not Mary and Elizabeth are cousins, for example (Jacobus 537)—it presents the

trinubium theory as unquestioned. The choice to present her lineage in this way, specifically in a female-centric poem, could relate again to the wave of interest in women's place in the church and religion. This version of the Saint Anne's "legend equated fertility with blessedness and connected Anne with Hannah, the mother of Samuel, who was granted three more sons and two daughters after she dedicated her firstborn to God's service" (Reames). Thus, this version of her lineage enforces Anne as a saint that appeals to laywomen. Anne is still a saint even though she goes on to have more marriages and children after her chaste marriage with Joachim. In this way, she does not become a saint exclusively for her vow of chastity. She achieves sainthood even after she chooses to marry and have sex again, despite having been a widow. Widowhood during this time was essentially considered the next best thing to virginity, as long as the widow did not use her newfound independence to threaten the patriarchal order (Sauer 52). Living as a widow, however, was not necessarily feasible for all women, especially laywomen, who may have required further financial support or more children. For this reason, the incorporation of the trinubium theory, despite its controversy, would have enhanced Anne's appeal to women, laywomen in particular.

Anne's appeal to women, and especially laywomen, bears interesting implications with regards to the language of this poem. The *Golden Legend* is a Latin text, but these verses are written in the vernacular, making them more accessible to the less-educated and women. In the middle to later parts of the Middle Ages, the communication of religion experienced this shift away from Latin and into vernacular languages. The bulk of the laity would not have been able to understand Latin, making most religious content obscure. As the strictness surrounding Latinity in religion loosened, there was more of an effort to present material that was both accessible and engaging. Humbert of Romans, a French friar from the thirteenth century, for

example, essentially argued that “it is one of the preacher’s responsibilities to make himself similar to his audience in whatever ways are compatible with his office and with good behavior” (Somerset 39). This shift manifested in two major ways: vernacularization and creativity. Simply, the language of sermons not only became vernacular, but the sermons themselves began to incorporate rhyme and other aspects of poetry as well as popular stories in order to better engage their audiences. The value of this type of preaching is recorded in the *Historia Anglorum*, which discusses “how a ‘very subtle and learned’ bishop sent to convert the English had failed miserably in the task ‘with his subtlety in sermons’; but how a less literate successor with his anecdotes and *examples* ‘converted well nigh the whole of England’” (Owst 152). This shift towards entertaining, relatable, and easy-to-understand sermons appears to have been an effective way to improve everyday people’s relationship with religion and the church. Creating accessible sermons was especially crucial in a time where preachers acted a sort of middle man between religious teachings and the people. Preachers would have “made the transition from the universal to the particular, and from Latin to vernacular, a transition that demanded his participation in ‘networks of oral narrativity,’ his ability not merely to convey doctrine but to make that doctrine live” (Somerset 36). The shifts in the format of sermons as well as the language would not only make this information easier to understand, but more entertaining and engaging as well, boosting the involvement of the laity in religion in two ways. Vernacular preaching became the new norm and persisted, changing the trajectory of the conduct of Christian sermons and laying the foundation for what they have become today.

“Modyr of Maries III” demonstrates the blend of vernacularity and creativity well.

Though I do not have enough evidence to say with certainty that this poem was used a sermon, it was produced in a time where sermons were of a similar format and content, making the poem

similar enough to contemporary poetic sermons that the comparison is useful. The poem is written within a miscellany kept in a priory. Siegfried Wenzel, in the first chapter of his book *Preachers, Poets, and the Early English Lyric*, acknowledges the complicated relationship between religious verse found in miscellanies and materials that can be properly identified as sermons. For example, he notes that MS Arundel 292, a miscellany also from a religious house, “contains material that very probably was used in preaching; yet its nine English items in verse, of two different periods, appear without specific sermon (or for that matter, any other) context” (Wenzel “Preachers,” 6). The context of these preaching materials mirror that of MS 123’s. Though there is nothing that explicitly links “Modyr of Maries III” to preaching, the form and content of this poem do certainly contain similarities to contemporary preaching materials. It links to the *Golden Legend*, an authoritative, though extra-biblical text, both through the similarity of its content and the marginal insertion of direct lines from the text. The focus and grounding of this poem in an authoritative religious text mirrors that of contemporary poetic sermons, “[f]or example, a Middle English sermon for the First Sunday of Lent [that] uses as its theme the words ‘If you are the Son of God, speak’ (Matthew 4.3)” (Wenzel “Sermon,” 66). The word “speak” is written into the margin and connected, by brackets, to a sermon written in verse in order to reinforce their relationship to the aforementioned verse. The marginal Latin verses help to link these verses to this particular trend and, thus, poetic sermon traditions more broadly. While the brackets in “Modyr of Maries III” do not ground the text in the Latin verses, the inclusion of the marginal Latin verses, even if they were added in at a later time, help to give the content of the verses credibility and suggest that the verses have been interacted with by a reader. The placement and structure of these verses compared to those of other poetic sermons help to suggest that these verses are consistent with vernacular preaching materials of this time.

While vernacularization was functional and desirable, especially for the laity, it also became a necessity due to outbreaks of the plague in 1348-49 (Goldberg 161) and “through the fifteenth century” (Goldberg 165). Such severe hits to the population opened up more job opportunities for young men. As a result, “[f]ewer boys viewed the church as a lucrative profession [...], so] the church responded pragmatically by lowering educational standards in an attempt to bolster clerical recruitment” (Barr 26). This sort of change in clerical education requirements further encouraged the shift of sermons into something more accessible to the laity. Vernacular sermons and *exempla* were not only more engaging for people with less education, they required less education of those giving them. As the education standards lowered for priests, “[Latin] treatises [would have been] quite beyond the range of their linguistic and theological knowledge,” and “[s]uch clerics should have welcomed utilitarian manuals that provided immediate answers to pastoral care problems and homily compilations that provided ready-to-preach sermons” (Barr 30). The technical features of these sermons reflect the decrease in educations. For example, “their rhyme-words betray great poverty of linguistic resources and imagination, for such rhymes as blode/rode/fode, dede/spede/mede, [...] adjectives in *-ful*, and participles or gerunds in *-ing* are ubiquitous to the point of being quite predictable” (Wenzel 100). “Modyr of Maries III” demonstrates a similarly unskillful rhyme scheme. For example, the poem rhymes “wys” (line 48), a filler word, with “blys” (line 52). While these vernacular sermons may have benefitted the laity, their popularity was not necessarily the direct result of a shift in orthodoxy beliefs. Instead, the shift towards vernacularity was influenced by a multitude of factors and even, in part, a compromise in order to best maintain church authority and educate the laity on church doctrine.

Though vernacular sermons were seemingly well regarded and even necessary around this time, the fifteenth century was also a time of severe conflict surrounding vernacularization, specifically with regards to religious texts. The conflict primarily stemmed from and surrounded John Wyclif and his supporters, called Lollards. Wyclif, an Oxford theologian, “rejected the Roman church, preferring a church comprising the body of the elect with all authority derived from the scriptures—‘lordship depended on grace’—and he denied transubstantiation and believed in the spiritual Eucharist rather than the physical one” (Ibeji). Lollards additionally questioned orthodox understandings of things such as “confession, images, pilgrimages, purgatory, and prayers to the saints,” which further fueled the controversy (Hudson 279). The most famous aspect of this movement is the Wycliffite Bible, a bible written in the vernacular. Wyclif’s

“ideas were apparently disseminated by means of vernacular preaching and texts, starting as early as the late 1370s, when Wyclif and some early supporters were, it seems, preaching in English, and continuing well into the fifteenth century through the preaching, writing, and translations of later Wycliffites despite efforts at repression [...] Not only was Wycliffism perceived as the “English heresy” because its adherents used English rather than Latin to promulgate their views, but the use of English was in itself linked to heresy: increasingly, any use of English to provide information previously confined to Latin, and any ownership of books in English, could become suspect” (Somerset 147).

For these reasons, using English in a religious context, especially written English, during the fifteenth century could have led controversy and even result in being burnt for heresy. Even those who did not follow or spread the theology of Wyclif could become victims of false

accusations of Lollardry. The controversial figure Margery Kempe writes that she was accused of being a lollard and threatened with burning, despite the fact that she never endorses Wyclif's ideas—in fact, her choices solidly contradict Wyclif's. This helps demonstrate the severity of the controversy surrounding this group, and vernacularization for its connection to them.

Regardless of the controversy, however, vernacularization persisted.

Though I cannot confirm that these verses were used as a sermon, their format and the manuscript that they are in place are characteristic of vernacular, versified sermons from this time period. As I mentioned in previous paragraphs, the text's simple but conventional poetic form corresponds with the format of roughly contemporary poetic sermons. The poem's place within a miscellany that contains several other types of texts, including other religious texts and medical works, corresponds with the place of other vernacular, poetic sermons. Poetry "had an established role in preaching generally, as well as in other forms of worship. Preaching manuals and private notebooks are full of vernacular poetry that priests or friars could work into their sermons, the better to reinforce their message to a restless audience" (Purdie 25-26). The marginal Latin verses, among other marginal notes throughout MS 123, suggest that this manuscript was engaged with and used as a learning tool within the convent that it belonged to. Whether or not the poetry was actually used as a sermon, it linked to religious texts and apparently used as a reference material much like other examples of preaching materials from this time period.

Much like f.121r's "Sultan Letters," "Modyr of Maries III" demonstrates a wide array of contemporary cultural and textual influences. Not only do these verses retell the lives of saints as they are presented in the *Golden Legend*, but they do so in English and with a focus on women. The vernacularization of these stories, and their presentation in a form that suggests

poetic sermon writing, ties to the complicated issues of language during this time. On one hand, it could demonstrate the desire for religious information to become more accessible and entertaining to the laity. On the other, it could be the result of lower clerical education standards as a result of the series of plague outbreaks spanning throughout this period. Both of these factors are further complicated by Wyclif, his followers, and their controversial beliefs, one of which was the desire to vernacularize religious texts. Furthermore, the very form of the poem connects it to literature of the era. The author's employment of the bob and wheel, especially when it does not demonstrate great skill, helps to link the poem to many other texts, both famous and inconsequential, and further indicate the popularity of the form itself. This poem's many ties to major cultural shifts of the fifteenth century, like the array of contemporary textual connections of the "Sultan Letters," enforces the fact that Aberdeen's MS 123 is an understudied manuscript. The relevance of these excerpts and their ability to connect several different issues and demonstrate the complexity of all of these things working together make them valuable resources to better understanding English people's relationships with each other, religion, and the world, among other things, and what sorts of occurrences appeared to influence it, during the fifteenth century.

CHAPTER 3

fol. 153 recto

Januarius

Here tellyth the dyetyng of blode letyng of man or woman in eu[ch]¹¹¹
 monyth yn the yere. In the monyth of Jenyuer, let the not blode on the
 first day for that ys perlous, ne the II day, nor the V day, nor the XV
 day, nor the X day, nor the XVX¹¹² day, nor the XXIII day. And therfor be
 5 ware for these be most perlus dyes to blede yn.

Februarius

In the monyth of Februare ete no potage¹¹³ of malwys¹¹⁴ for then they are
 venym. And, yif thu have need to blede, blede on the wryste on the veyne
 of the thowbe,¹¹⁵ but blede not on the IIII day, nor the VI day, nor the VIII day,
 nor the XVII day, nor the XXVI, nor the XXVIII day, but the XIIII day is gode.

Marcius

10 In the monyth of Marche, ete fyges¹¹⁶ and reysynges¹¹⁷ and other swete metes and
 drynkes and hote metes. Lete the blode on the ryght arme on the V day or the VII or the
 XVII day for that ys gode for al maner of fevyr. But blede not on the first day
 nor on the XV day, nor on the XVI day, nor on the XVIII, nor on the XXVIII day
 for that ys not godely, as the boke seyth.

¹¹¹ Half of the word is missing due to damage. The replacement is my best guess using context and the MED.

¹¹² Denotes the number 19

¹¹³ potion

¹¹⁴ mallows

¹¹⁵ thumb

¹¹⁶ figs

¹¹⁷ raisins

Aprilis

15 In the monyth of Apryll, blede on the left arme on the III day or on the XI day
 or the XV day, and thu shalt have no gret hedache nor lese not his syght that yere.
 And use fresh¹¹⁸ flesch and hote metes, but blede not on the VII day, nor on the VIII,
 nor on the X day, nor on the XX day.

Mayus

In the monyth of May, ryse erly, ete and drynk betymus,¹¹⁹ and use hot metes and
 20 drynkes, but ete nother hedys ne fete whyl May lastyth. And blede on the firs[t]
 or on the XVII day, on which ame the lyst, or on the XXVII day, and hyt
 shall helpe the ageynst all evylls. But blede not on the III day, n[or] [the VI],¹²⁰
 nor on the XXV day.

fol. 153 verso

Junis

In ye monyth of Juny, sum feassians¹²¹ seyn that it is gode to drynk
 25 every day a quantite of cold water fastyng and rule the wat metes and
 drynkes measurably and ete letuse and sauge.¹²² And, yif thu have need
 to blede, blede on the XXIII day, for that is right gode. But blede not on the
 VII day, nor the X day, nor the XV day, nor the XXV day.

¹¹⁸ Appears as “flesh” in the manuscript, which is likely a misspelling. I have changed it to “fresh” for clarity, based off of the Bodleian Library’s MS Rawlinson A. 429.

¹¹⁹ betony, a medicinal plant.

¹²⁰ Missing due to damage, but the missing section has been inferred using Linne R. Mooney’s transcription of the Bodleian Library’s MS Rawlinson A. 429.

¹²¹ physicians

¹²² sage

Julius

In the monyth of July, kepe the fro wemen for than thy brayn
 30 and thyn humours ben opyn. And blede not in that monyth, but yif thu have
 the mose need. And blede not on the XIII day, nor the XV day, nor the
 XVX day, nor the XXII day.

Augustius

In the monyth of August, ete no maner wateres nor hote metes nor drynkes
 of spycery.¹²³ Nor blede not on the fyrst day, nor on the XIX day, nor XX
 35 day, nor on the XXX day.

September

In the monyth of September, all maner of frute that is gode and lyte
 ys gode to ete. And blede not¹²⁴ on the XVII day nor on the XXVIII day
 and of the dropsy, not of fransye,¹²⁵ nor the palsey, nor of the fallyng
 evyll drede the not that yere. And yif thu nede to blede be war
 40 of the III day, the IIII day, the XVI day, and the XXII day for these be perlous.

October

In the monyth of October, drynke gode wyn therof thu may but blede
 not but yif thu have more need. And blede not on the III day, nor on
 the VI day, nor the XVI, nor the XXIII day.

¹²³ medical spices, or, possibly, spiced wine or ale

¹²⁴ Likely an error, as every other manuscript lists these as good days to bleed on, and the rest of the sentence suggests that these days prevent dropsy, frenzy, palsy, and epilepsy.

¹²⁵ insanity

folio 154 recto

November

In the monyth of November not but yif thu have the more nede
 45 for thy blode ys gadryd that tyme in to thy hed veyne. And bathe the not
 in hote bathis but abeute the with garsyng for then ben all thy humours
 over weyke to blede and in cas thu haue gret nede to blede was the V day,
 the VI day, the XV day, the XVX day, XXVIII day, and the XXVX¹²⁶ day.

December

In the monyth of Decembur blede not but hit be the more nede and yif
 50 thu wilt blede blede on the XXVI day for than is ryght gode bewar of
 the VII day, of the XV day, of the XVI day, of the XXVII day, and of the XXII
 day. Nor in that monyth com ny no fyre thy thonkes.

Tres perulori lunares¹²⁷

The fyrst Monday of Janyner, the fyrst Monday of Juny, and the second
 Monday of October and blede non of thyse for they be perlus.

Alii tres lunares perulori¹²⁸

55 The fyrst Monday of Feneryer, the last Monday of May, and the last Monday
 of September.

The malyce of thyse III dayes, as clerkes seyn, that what childe is gotyn
 or bard any of these III daye other he shal peryshid with fyre or water or

¹²⁶ Denotes the number 29

¹²⁷ *Three perilous Mondays*

¹²⁸ *The other three perilous Mondays*

sum other myschenas deth. And yif she be awoman childe hap to be a [comyn]¹²⁹
60 woman¹³⁰ or sum othar evyl doer and to have a sory ende safe gode [...]ers
and Goddys help be the more.

¹²⁹ Missing due to damage—word filled in using context from Patrick J. Horner’s transcription of “Three Perilous Mondays” from Digby 88 f. 77.

¹³⁰ promiscuous woman

Gender and Preventative Care

MS 123's f.153r-154r contains a copy of Version B of a bloodletting calendar entitled "Diet & Bloodletting" followed by two excerpts from "32 Perilous Days,"¹³¹ which are called "*Tres Perulori Lunares*" (Three Perilous Mondays) and "*Alii Tres Lunares Perulori*" (Another Three Perilous Mondays). "Diet & Bloodletting" details the good and bad days for bloodletting in each month paired with dietary and lifestyle recommendations. The two excerpts from "32 Perilous Days" introduce six more perilous days for bloodletting. "*Alii Tres Lunares Perulori*" follows its three Mondays with a specific warning about the fates of children born on these days. Though little has been written about either of these excerpts, they are works that reflect a standardized and popular example of preventative and prognostic care for the average medieval person. Both of these works, as vernacular medical texts, reflect the development of written English as a time where cultural shifts allowed for English to be used in more professional circumstances. Noting their place within a manuscript that contains Latin medical texts, among other things, helps to reveal the increasing respect for and circulation of vernacular medical guides. The popularity of these particular texts, inferred from their frequency in other manuscripts, further enforce that these texts were standard and well-circulated. The specific advice given in these excerpts also reveal the bias against women in medieval medicine. Because these texts belong to such a popular and standardized tradition of medical texts, the advice and biases within them were widely spread and likely influential in, and reiterating, cultural perceptions of women. The study of these two excerpts help to give information on the

¹³¹ These two texts appear close to each other again in the British Library's Arundel 359. "Diet & Bloodletting" is on ff. 15v-17v (Mooney 250) and "32 Perilous Days" is on f. 19 (Horner 39).

dissemination and development of vernacular medical texts as well as crucial details about sexism in medieval medicine.

Cross-referencing the content of this bloodletting calendar with a table created by Linne R. Mooney has led me to conclude that it belongs to a family of texts called “Diet & Bloodletting” Version B, despite the fact that she lists MS 123 as containing Version A. The manuscripts and their excerpts listed as belonging to Version B include the Bodleian Library’s Rawlinson A. 429 (f. 92-92v), the British Library’s Arundel 359 (ff. 15v-17v) and Sloane 610 (ff. 3-4), and the Wellcome Historical Medical Library’s MS 405 (ff. 67-81v) (Mooney 257). These manuscripts range from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, making them largely contemporary with MS 123, a mid-fifteenth century manuscript. Using Mooney’s chart, I was able to compare the days listed as perilous for bloodletting, days listed as good for bloodletting, and certain specific details, such as where to bleed or why, in Aberdeen’s MS 123 with those of seventeen other manuscripts that include the text “Diet & Bloodletting.” The four aforementioned Version B manuscripts align almost perfectly with MS123 in these details, with it matching most consistently with Wellcome Historical Medical Library’s MS 405.

MS 123 varies slightly from Mooney’s descriptions of the differences between versions A and B, but it appears to align better with the content in Version B. She notes that the B texts “exclude the introduction and reverse the order of the information given for several months” (Mooney 248). MS 123, like Version B, does not include the introduction that attributes the advice to Galen. It includes a slight introduction (“Here tellyth the dyetyng of blode letyng of man or woman in eu[ch] monyth yn the yere” (lines 1-2)) not found in MS Rawlinson A. 429, the transcribed Version B, but this introduction is built into the advice for January and, again, excludes any reference to Galen. Rawlinson A. 429 also does not appear to invert the structure

of the advice and, indeed, presents it in the same order as both MS Ashmole 1477, the transcribed Version A, and MS 123. Because the example Version B does not even include this inversion, it is fair to say that the lack of inversion in MS 123 does not discount it from being classified as Version B. Due to the number of similarities of MS 123 to the other Version B texts, the abridged introduction and lack of inversion do not seem to be enough to prevent this text from being classified as Version B.

In order to highlight the place of MS 123's bloodletting calendar within this family of texts, I created two charts in the same format as Mooney's on pages 259-261. Figure one illustrates the days MS 123 warns against bloodletting, which highlights its consistency with the other four recorded Version B manuscripts. Figure two demonstrates all of the days that MS 123 suggests for bloodletting as well as significant details or phrases that occur in the advice of the given month. These details are listed in the key and also follow Mooney's model. Figure two demonstrates MS 123's consistency with the Version B manuscripts both in the days listed as well as the specific details mentioned in each month. The bulk of the details catalogued in these charts support MS 123's place within the "Diet & Bloodletting" Version B family.

Fig. 1

Comparison of Dates Named as Perilous Days for Bloodletting in Aberdeen MS123											
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
1	4	1	7	3	7	13	1	3	3	5	7
2	6	15	8	6*	10	15	19	4	6	6	15
5	8	16	10	25	15	19	20	16	16	15	16
10	17	18	20		25	22	30	17	23	19	22

15	26	28						22		28	27
19	28							28		29	
24											

*missing due to manuscript damage; number inserted based off of context

Fig. 2

Comparison of Dates Named as Auspicious for Bloodletting in Aberdeen MS 123					
Mar	Apr	May	June	Sept	Dec
5	3	13	24		26
7	11	17			
17	15	27			
<i>a, d</i>	<i>b, e, f</i>	<i>c, i</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>l, m, n,</i> <i>p</i>	<i>u</i>

Key: *a.* in the right arm; *b.* in the left arm; *c.* in either arm; *d.* against fever(s); *e.* not lose sight; *f.* against headache; *i.* against evil(s); *l.* against dropsy; *m.* against frenzy; *n.* against palsy; *p.* against epilepsy; *u.* is right good

While MS 123 corresponds well enough in general to classify it as a Version B text, its version of September and its inconsistency with the other Version B manuscripts could potentially complicate this classification or the understanding of “Diet & Bloodletting” and its distribution. Rather than suggesting a new set of information featured in this manuscript alone, the inconsistencies appear to be the result of scribal error. Instead of listing the bad and the good

days for letting blood, it cautions against both sets of days. Every single Version B manuscript catalogued by Mooney lists the 17th and the 28th as good days to let blood, and most of them claim that these days will protect one from dropsy, frenzy, palsy, and epilepsy (Mooney 261). These same conditions are listed following a reference to the 17th and the 28th in MS 123, though this text suggests that the reader “blede not on” these days in order to avoid them (line 37). The similarity between the specific details and even the phrasing of this particular aspect of MS 123’s September and the other Septembers suggests that the inversion of this advice is likely due to a scribal error. In addition to this, nowhere else does the calendar have two separate lists within one month for perilous days for bleeding. Instead, if there are ever two lists of days, one is for the good days and the other for the bad, which further suggests that this inconsistency is an error rather than a different set of information. Had this error not been made, this aspect of the MS 123 calendar would better correspond with the other Version B manuscripts in the month of September.

Recognizing the consistencies between f.153r-154r and the Version B texts has helped to fill in parts of the text where there has been damaged. April, May, and October have all lost some of their text due to damage. Fragments of missing words and the text’s repetitive language helps to fill in most of these blanks with reasonable certainty, but the information gleaned from the other “Diet & Bloodletting” manuscripts helps to fill in more specific information. Using Mooney’s transcriptions of the Bodleian Library’s MS Ashmole 1477 and Rawlinson A 429 as well as the dates catalogued from the other “Diet & Bloodletting” texts, I was able to fill in the missing day on line 22. Along with the 3rd and the 25th, the other Version B manuscripts, and a Version A manuscript, list the 6th as another perilous day for bloodletting. The corner missing in MS 123’s May interrupts the list of perilous days—the damage preceded by the 3rd day and

followed by the 25th. Using this context, I supplemented “n[or] [the VI]” for the missing information (line 22). For October and April, I was able to confirm partially visible words using the information from the other manuscripts.

Following “Diet & Bloodletting” are “*Tres Perulori Lunares*” and “*Alii Tres Lunares Perulori*.” Patrick J. Horner transcribes an occurrence of “Three Perilous Mondays” from f. 77 of the Bodleian Library’s MS Digby 88 and notes that it is “an extract from a treatise on the thirty-two perilous days in the year” (39). The section he transcribes corresponds with MS 123’s “*Alii Tres Lunares Perulori*.” Both list the same three Mondays and advice regarding female children born on these days, however Digby 88 includes information regarding male children that MS 123 does not. Based off of this comparison, “*Alii Tres Lunares Perulori*,” and, presumably, “*Tres Perulori Lunares*” as well, appear to belong to the family of texts entitled “32 Perilous Days.” According to Mooney’s chart, the full version of this text discusses perilous days in a similar way to “Diet & Bloodletting” though the dates listed in both texts are not particularly consistent. Either way, the similar nature of the texts likely explains why they were paired together.

“*Alii Tres Lunares Perulori*” and “*Tres perulori Lunares*” roughly fall under the category of lunary. A lunary “may be defined as ‘a set of prognostications based upon the position of the moon at specific times.’” (Means 376). Laurel Means loosely classifies MS 123’s excerpts from “32 Perilous Days” as a lunary, but acknowledges the difficulty solidly labeling it (Means 383). The excerpts do not explicitly reference astrology or the position of the moon, but the titles, through their inclusion of *lunares*, have their connection to the moon embedded in them. In these excerpts, “the moon plays a somewhat more obvious role in the case of ‘perilous Mondays,’ revealed by the occasional rubric ‘*Dies Periculosi Lunares*’”—similar to the titles in

MS 123 (Means 384). Another part of the difficulty comes from its incorporation of elements of a destinary, or “a group of prognostications based upon time of birth, determining destiny” (Means 386). Considering the content of these excerpts and that they come from “32 Perilous Days,” which describes the days “considered perilous on which to fall sick, let blood, begin a journey, wed, or begin a great work,” the texts certainly align with the description of a destinary (Mooney 258). Regardless of the difficulty placing these excerpts into a solid category, it is clear that they use some astrology in order to make predictions about the perilousness of certain days. This is similar to “Diet & Bloodletting” in that it enforces the concept of inherently good and bad days based off of astrology in order to lead a healthier, more fulfilling life.

Both “Diet & Bloodletting” and “32 Perilous Days” can be categorized as prognostic texts. Rossel Hope Robbins breaks vernacular medical manuscripts “into three main areas—prognosis, diagnosis, and treatment” (“Medical,” 395). A prognostic text specifically serves to predict what the outcome of a treatment and illness might be. In medieval medicine this often meant “the astrological determination of the possibility of effecting a cure and the most favorable times for treatment” (Robbins “Medical,” 395). Thus, these texts do not necessarily offer specific cures for ailments, but rather the best times to attempt treatments and take certain preventative measures. Commonly, prognostic texts were “concerned with the desirability of letting blood,” like “Diet & Bloodletting” (Robbins “Medical,” 397). MS 123’s excerpts from “32 Perilous” days do not explicitly deal with bloodletting, though it is still a prognostic text for its predictions regarding the impact of certain days on the health and destiny of a person. The nature of their advice and vernacularity, then, suggest that these texts are conventional for their time.

Like I discussed in chapter two, the mid-fifteenth century was a time in which language practices were shifting away from Latin and towards the vernacular, and this shift included medical texts. In the fourteenth century, “[t]he first phase of vernacularisation of academic and surgical texts started [...]. Translators of medical texts struggled with many difficulties in both syntax and lexicon to find adequate expressions in English, as scientific writing in the vernacular was new and new conventions had to be created” (Taavitsainen “Vernacularisation,” 159). These same challenges appeared as sermons and other religious texts were switched to the more accessible vernacular. The shifts and developments associated with vernacularization influenced the language of these medical texts. There was a language trend where

“[i]n some cases the phrase *it is to* + *V* was preceded by an evaluative adjective of the type good. Such phrases have a somewhat different, less categorical, and more instructive tone. Phrases of this type occur more frequently in remedy books, e.g. all occurrences in ‘Diet & Bloodletting’ and Andrew Boorde’s ‘Dyetary’ were of this type, which explains why the overall relative frequency of the phrase in them was so high. These phrases are all followed by a verb of action, such as *arise*, *drink*, *use*” (Taavitsainen “Vernacularisation,” 180).

Notably repetitive language and sentence structure can also be observed in MS 123’s version of “Diet & Bloodletting.” This particular sentence structure, however, has been simplified in MS 123. Taavitsainen’s listed example from “Diet & Bloodletting” is: “In May, *gode it is to aryse erlye of thye bede*” (“Vernacularisation,” 180). MS 123, on the other hand, drops the “*gode it is*” and says instead “In the monyth of May, ryse erly” (line 19). In MS 123, “it is” appears once in this sort of context, but the sentence structure is inverted. June lists that “it is gode to drynk” (line 24). This demonstrates the sort of development and refining of language that took place

during this time period. The text drops “gode it is” making the recommendations into commands, both streamlining the information and increasing the sense of authority. Where the text does choose to include it, it inverts the wording in order to make it more direct, as demonstrated in the aforementioned excerpt from May. MS 123, in these ways, appears to show the subtle changes in language that helped to make written English clearer and more precise. The specific language used in MS 123’s “Diet & Bloodletting” and even in the excerpts from “32 Perilous Days,” like the other samples I have chosen from this manuscript, reflect the cultural shifts taking place in England in the fifteenth century and their impact on language.

Like the shift in sentence structure indicates the refinement of language, the voice used in these texts demonstrates a use of authority in the vernacular. Taavitsainen claims that, in vernacular medical texts, “the passive voice gives knowledge as received from above, whereas personal pronouns of the first and second person emphasize the author's role and judgement in shaping or recording knowledge and the recipient's role as a receiver” (“Vernacularisation,” 163). Interestingly, however, neither MS 123’s “Diet & Bloodletting” or “32 Perilous Days” adhere to this model, as they do not use the passive voice and include second person pronouns. Despite this, they still manage to develop a sense of authority through their language. Instead of using the passive voice to suggest that the advice comes from a greater source, “Diet & Bloodletting” structures its sentences as commands and avoids unnecessary wordiness. For example, “In the monyth of Apryll, blede on the left arme” (line 15). Here, the text commands the reader to bleed on the left arm as opposed to recommending it. The concise wording contributes to the advice’s authority, as it seems that the writer is certain of their orders. Both texts avoid words “such as *forsoth* (*vero*, *autem*), *maybe*, and *perhaps*” and creating a “debate form which [is] built on discussion and [reaches] consensus at the end” (Taavitsainen

“Vernacularisation,” 163). The more straightforward approach to giving the advice lends its own sort of authority to the text. Furthermore, the text derives authority from above through a few vague references to various authorities, including “sum feassians”¹³² (line 24) and “the boke”¹³³ (line 14). These moments indicate that this information has been received from others and, for that, carries some form of authority. The construction of authority in these texts help to reveal the shifts and trends in written English and its developing ability to convey authority.

The texts’ vernacularity also helps to clarify their readership and use. Their language indicates that they were more accessible than fully Latin medical texts and likely used by those with less education. MS 123’s inclusion of several pointedly accessible vernacular texts highlights the shifts in required education for clergy, and how this gradually pushed language in medieval England from Latin to English. Their status as vernacular medical texts reveal something even more interesting about these cultural shifts. In the vernacular, medicine would become available to a wider audience, making medical care more accessible. To a certain degree, there were patterns with regards to medical texts and their audiences. For example, “university medicine was for physicians of the highest class, surgical books for surgeons and barber-surgeons, and remedy books for a large and heterogeneous group including medical practitioners of all classes and lay people” (Taavitsainen “Vernacularisation,” 160). These divisions, however, are “complicated as ownership studies indicate that physicians of the highest class, such as John Argentine of King's College, Cambridge, had more popular materials as well, and that professional medical books were owned by lay people” (Taavitsainen “Vernacularisation,” 160). The varied ownership of medical texts helps to explain in part why

¹³² physicians

¹³³ Likely referring to a medical text.

these texts are written in the vernacular. If these sorts of texts were being read by people other than trained physicians and, presumably, people with less education, it makes sense that they would be translated from Latin into more accessible languages.

MS 123's place within a religious house further clarifies the issue of ownership, readership, and circulation of these texts. *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries* approximately places MS 123 "at the Augustinian convent of Warrington" (Ker 11). Being located in a religious house would impact its readership and use, as

"[m]edieval monasteries are known in medical history for their role in preserving and disseminating medical knowledge, particularly in the centuries prior to the rise of universities and the religious reforms that took hold in the twelfth century. What the current examination of monastic documents makes clear is that the religious did not necessarily experience medical care as described in the books that they themselves compiled and copied" (Bowers 179).

While this manuscript is dated about 300 years later than the twelfth century, MS 123's place in a convent could indicate a lingering concept of religious houses as stores of knowledge.

Additionally, the fact that the information and advice in this miscellany did not have to apply to those living in the house helps to explain the unusual pairing of information. The manuscript shows an interest in women, particularly in its religious texts but also in "32 Perilous Days," that does not inherently make sense seeing as it was kept in a men's religious house. If the information was stored in this miscellany simply for the sake of preserving knowledge, that helps to better explain why these texts would end up in the location that they did.

The texts' particular placement in MS 123, considering the other texts within in the manuscript, help to reveal the status of vernacular medical texts during the mid-fifteenth century.

MS 123 contains many different types of texts, as this project demonstrates, in both Latin and English, and the language used is not particular to any one genre of text. While the two medical texts I have chosen to discuss are in English, there are other medical and astrological works in Latin throughout. Examples of this include f. 65r, a volvelle “(or revolving rota of several stiff vellum discs, with a revolving pointer),” f. 85v, a drawing of a man’s body labeled with astrological signs,¹³⁴ and f. 76v, a section on astrology featuring a diagram, but there are many more tables, passages, and diagrams discussing astrology throughout the whole manuscript (Robbins “Medical,” 396). The inclusion of vernacular medical texts with functional Latin tools and tables suggests that the vernacular texts had become popular and authoritative enough to be considered alongside them. As the English language was refined in its use for medicine and these texts were circulated, the vernacular texts began to gain their own authority, eventually to be collected just like they were any other piece of medical knowledge. The existence of the vernacular “Diet & Bloodletting” and excerpts from “32 Perilous Days” within this particular manuscript give insight into the process of regularizing and giving authority to the written vernacular.

In addition to readership and use, the texts, for their vernacularity, reveal what medical care looked like for the everyday people in the Middle Ages. As vernacular prognostic texts, they offer “a fairly accurate picture of how the average man and woman (apart from the handful who could afford or find a doctor of physick) were treated in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England” (Robbins “Medical,” 395). The focus on preventative care, through diet and the strategic avoidance of certain dates, reveal the steps that people in the Middle Ages

¹³⁴ A similar image appears in the British Library’s MS. Egerton 2572, f. 50v (Taavitsainen “Zodiacal,” 287). A description of the information demonstrated in this image also appears in the Bodleian’s Digby 88 f.29v (Horner 34).

could, and likely would, take in order to maintain their health on a daily basis as well as the sorts of concerns that they had. Food is an important part of maintaining one's health, but,

“[i]n the Middle Ages, diet was sometimes difficult to control due to lack of ability to store food properly, or even at all, and to purchase a variety of foods. The majority of the population, whether wealthy or impoverished, would have consumed meats and grains, adding in vegetables, herbs, and fruits that were seasonally available. Nevertheless, if an imbalance was perceived, efforts were usually made to adjust the affected person's diet as possible” (Sauer 38).

These sorts of seasonal shifts are reflected in the advice given in “Diet & Bloodletting.” June, for example, recommends “to drynk every day a quantite of cold water” which corresponds with the warmer weather beginning in summer (lines 24-25). Similarly, September recommends introducing “all maner of frute that is gode and lyte” (line 36). The advice regarding food reflect the seasonal diet adjustments that would have been beneficial for the average person in the Middle Ages. Many of the months, September in particular, reveal a fear of illnesses such as epilepsy. “*Alii Tres Lunares Perulori*,” in a different vein, demonstrates concern regarding the moral and physical destinies of female children based of their birthdates. This text helps to reveal the perceived intersections of physical and spiritual health, in which the sickness of either were understood as physically preventable and treatable. They additionally highlight the prevalence of bloodletting in medieval society, as it was viewed as not only a wellness practice but a treatment for a multitude of conditions. The vernacularity of the text also reinforces that it was a procedure available to the average person. In these ways, the vernacularity of these texts reveal the how the average person would have thought of illness and treatment and what sorts of treatments that would have been available to them.

The gendered aspects of these texts demonstrate a more troubling aspect of everyday medieval medicine. In order to better understand this, laying out a general outline of medieval concepts of women's bodies is necessary. Using Galen's humoral theory, the Middle Ages constructed an understanding of men and women's bodies that situated them not only as opposites, but into a hierarchy, with women at the bottom, as well. Women's bodies were understood as "cold and wet, with porous and leaky boundaries" in contrast to men's perceived hot and dry nature (Sauer 26). These humoral differences were associated with activity (male) and passivity (female), and, "[b]ecause women are the passive principle in generation, the production of female offspring must arise because of something going wrong; hence women are defective, misbegotten men" (Sauer 30). What was understood to be the inherent, biological inferiority of women puts them immediately at a disadvantage. This perceived inferiority bled over into all other aspects of life, reducing women's bodily autonomy and ability to act in society.

Menstruation plays a key part in the subjugation of medieval women. Women's bodies were understood to be more absorbent than men's, and

"menstruation functioned to purge women of bad humors caught in their wet and spongy flesh. In fact, the Hippocratic opine that if menstruation does not occur, then the surplus blood will come out through another orifice or continue to build up in the body, putting pressure on different organs until disease or even death results" (Sauer 38).

This belief both implied a sort of malfunction in women's anatomy and that menstrual blood was a toxin. As a result, menstruation, though it was thought of as necessary, carried with it a stigma that impacted the way that women were treated medically and perceived socially. The belief that women naturally trapped more toxins or were weaker than men led to misunderstandings

regarding women's health. For example, stigma surrounding sexually transmitted infections was particularly targeted towards women. They "came to be seen as particular sources of the disease [...], since they were considered the weaker sex, and predisposed to sin and lust, it followed that if women were chaste, the disease would disappear" (Sauer 40). The predisposition toward dirtiness and sinfulness negatively impacted women all around and made a major impact on the way that they were treated medically.

In "Diet & Bloodletting," the fear of women's sexuality and perceived inherent dirtiness appears most clearly in July. The author tells men to "kepe the fro wemen for than thy brayn and thyn humours ben opyn," implying the danger of women to men's health (lines 29-30). Both version A and Version B of "Diet & Bloodletting" include a similar line, though they supplement women for lechery. Version A specifically suggests that the reader should "kepe the fro lecherye, for thy brayne, for thane goderethe wicked humors" (Mooney 252 lines 31-32). Version B, which matches MS 123 more closely, states that the reader should "kepe þe fro lichery, for þi brayn & þin humers ben alway opyn" (Mooney 254 lines 40-41). This piece of advice is as consistent in "Diet & Bloodletting" as the advice to "ete fyges" in March or any other seemingly inconsequential piece of advice which is indicative of just how accepted women's inferiority and threat were in medieval England (line 10). The switch in the word choice also enforces this. Women and lechery become interchangeable in these texts, implying that the two are so intertwined that it would not change the meaning of the advice to switch the words. The consistent implied association of women with impurity in "Diet & Bloodletting" enforces the culture's notions about women.

The fear of women's impurity, however, can become even further warped beyond biological inferiority and into a belief that women are the downfalls of men. Misunderstandings

of women's anatomy were twisted enough to make them into dangerous. For example, in the *De secretis mulierum*, men are cautioned against "[having] sexual intercourse with menstruating women [...] because by doing so he can contract leprosy...this stink will corrupt a man's insides" (Sauer 42). Because the conception of a child was believed to have resulted from the mixture of semen and menstrual blood, menstrual blood was perceived as always, in some capacity, present in a woman's body (Sauer 27). The belief that menstruating women will result in the death of men corresponds with the "the cultural myth of the promiscuous woman who brings about men's downfalls while escaping consequences" (Sauer 42). The already intertwined misunderstanding of women's anatomy and oppression that they face within their society are both at play in these sorts of harmful concepts. Menstruating and sexually active women, as a result of these myths, are construed as not only biologically inferior to men, but, at times, actively pursuing the destruction of men. These sorts of beliefs correspond with the advice given in July. If a man already suffers from an excess of bad humors, sexual interactions with women, who regularly secrete bad humors, will only worsen this condition.

"*Alii Tres Lunares Perulori*" also incorporates the idea that sexual women are dangerous and something deviant from the healthy norm. This text cautions the reader against conceiving or having a female child on certain days lest she become "a [comyn]¹³⁵ woman or sum othar evyl doer" (lines 59-60). In both this excerpt and the month of July, the author warns the reader about sexually active women. When phrased like this, being a promiscuous or otherwise immoral woman becomes comparable to having an illness. In doing so, it blends spiritual and physical health, implying that a woman's health is jeopardized if she is immoral. MS 123's version of this excerpt also uses language that places women especially on the fringe, unlike the version

¹³⁵ promiscuous

found in f. 77 of MS Digby 88. This manuscript includes the statement, “yf a man childe be borne he shal be brente or drowned or else he shall dye soddenly” (Horner 39). MS 123 says, instead, “what childe is gotyn or bard any of these III daye, other he shal peryshid with fyre or water or sum other myschenas deth (lines 57-59). MS 123 refers to a male child simply as a “childe,” but it specifically acknowledges “a[]woman childe” (line 59). The pointed recognition of a female child as a specific type of child as opposed to a child in general further establishes the male body as the norm and the female as something “other.” The othering of women in this context enforces the negative stereotypes surrounding them.

Similar language issues appear in “Diet & Bloodletting” as well. The text’s brief introduction claims that the text intends on talking about the “dyetyng of blode letyng of man or woman” (line 1). Despite this, the phrasing of the advice at certain moments reveals that it was put together with a male body in mind. While much of the advice technically seems to be universal, taking the moments where it directly addresses men reveals something about the bias in medicine during this time period. The advice in July not only enforces negative stereotypes about women, but it assumes a male reader as well. Women cannot stay away from women, and, generally, women are not understood to be having sex with other women at this time. The advice, then, is catered directly to a male audience, but the text does nothing to clarify that it is going to address the male audience specifically. Similarly, there are no instances within this text in which a female audience is specifically addressed. In this way, the text constructs a male-bodied norm that reinforces the idea that men are the normal and women are the defects.

The construction of men as normal not only derive from the cultural perception of women as inferior, but it reflects the sheer lack of knowledge surrounding women’s health issues. Simply, if physicians know little about women’s anatomy, they will have little advice to give

them specifically. This in part stems from the “systematic opposition of Christian religious authorities to the opening of human cadavers” (Charlier). Seeing as men were more likely to die in battle or other circumstances that would allow their anatomy to be studied, their anatomy was better understood than women’s. A particularly good example of this sort of misunderstanding includes the wandering womb theory, which assumed that “when a woman wasn’t pregnant, the uterus could actually detach and move around the body like an erratic animal” (Sauer 44). This type of confusion and misunderstanding contributed to the negative construction of women within medieval culture. Due to the perception of women and women’s health issues, they, supposedly, “from the condition of their fragility, out of shame and embarrassment do not dare reveal their anguish over their diseases (which happen in such a private place) to a physician” (Green 65). Texts like *Trotula* had to be made in order to compensate for the lack of appropriate medicine for women during the Middle Ages. Even texts like “Diet & Bloodletting,” which were common, accessible, and popular, did not take women into account in subtle ways and enforced the misconceptions about women’s bodies.

Modern medicine maintains a somewhat comparable, though less extreme, disparity in its understanding of the manifestation of illnesses in women’s bodies. Only in 1990 did the U.S.’s National Institutes of Health (NIH) “[require] the inclusion of women in all NIH-sponsored clinical research. Since 1994, the NIH has also required analyses of trial outcomes by sex” (Hamberg 238). Women today and in the recent past, then, similarly encounter medical information presented as general advice, but actually tailored to men’s bodies. The lack of representation of women’s bodies in medical research and care can be linked the constructed gender hierarchy, present both today and in the Middle Ages. This “‘gender order’ in society means that a ‘normal’ human being is assumed to be a man, women as a group are regularly

subordinated to men, and boys and men are seen as being more important and valuable compared with girls and women” (Hamberg 237). The same disregard for women can be seen in the aforementioned medieval beliefs about menstruation and women’s inherent dirtiness or immorality. These sorts of perceptions and misunderstandings have never been thoroughly shaken off by Euro-American societies and continue to persist in medicine and other aspects of life.

Gender bias in medicine still results in worse treatment for women than men. Due to anatomical and societal gender differences, there is a variation in the care that men and women require, but there is “evidence that women, for no apparent medical reason, are not offered the same treatment as men, a phenomenon that raises the question of gender bias. Many studies, for example, show that women are less likely than men to receive more advanced diagnostic and therapeutic interventions” (Hamberg 237). As a result, women are put at a greater risk of receiving the wrong or no treatment. Furthermore, “[r]esearch indicates that physicians are more likely to interpret men’s symptoms as organic and women’s as psychosocial [...], and female patients are assigned more nonspecific symptom diagnoses [...]. Women are also prescribed more psychoactive drugs than men” (Hamberg 238). The perception of women’s issues as mental as opposed to physical mirrors the gendered idea of hysteria, tied to wandering womb theory, which has “been around for centuries” (Sauer 44). Whether or not it is intentional or fully acknowledged, the belief that being a woman makes a person naturally predisposed to mental illness or instability persists even today. The gender bias that modern society has inherited and continues to perpetuate put women at a greater risk of misdiagnosis, mistreatment, and even death.

MS 123's "Diet & Bloodletting" and excerpts from "32 Perilous Days" are significant to our understanding of the development of the written English language, circulation of medical texts, and the deep-rootedness of gender bias in medieval and modern medicine. The texts reveal the shifts from Latin to English in medical texts around the fifteenth century, and how the sentence structures developed as the written English language became more refined in various different fields. The place of manuscript within a convent also suggests not only that religious houses were still storing knowledge for the sake of knowledge, but that vernacular medical texts had gained enough authority at that point to be included alongside professional Latin medical texts. The content of these excerpts is equally revealing with regards to societal beliefs about women. The texts demonstrate the negative assumptions about women that derived in part from misunderstandings about their anatomy. These same sorts of misconceptions developed into the very same gender bias that we experience in modern medicine and continue to put women at a greater risk for health issues and mistreatment. The gender bias present in modern medicine derives from the same sexism present in "Diet & Bloodletting" and "32 Perilous Days," and, while we have made progress and an effort to try to level out these imbalances, medicine still has a ways to go before this deep-rooted and systemic inequality can be corrected.

Conclusion

After considering several excerpts from various genres within this manuscript, it becomes clear that the subjects and texts contained in MS 123 align with those in other roughly contemporary miscellanies. The combination of reference texts on various topics, such as religion, science, politics, etc., occur in many other manuscripts from the fifteenth century. For example, Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe* is a well-known reference text, and medical calendars, like "Diet & Bloodletting" and "32 Perilous Days," have appeared in at least fourteen other manuscripts (Mooney 248-250). Even in my fairly limited and focused research, I happened to identify two additional excerpts from MS 123, outside of my selections, in other manuscripts.¹³⁶ The quantity of recognizable texts reveal that this manuscript was in contact and engaged with other prevalent, practical works during its time. Beyond the individual recognizable texts, the combination of different topics contained within this one manuscript corresponds with others of the late Middle Ages. In addition to the consistencies with regards to medical and scientific texts, miscellanies are actually one of "the sole source[s] for our knowledge of Middle English verse to the end of the fourteenth century" (Wenzel "Preachers," 4). It is typical, then, for creative and technical texts to exist in the same space, as they do in MS 123. Furthermore, the British Library's Arundel 359, another miscellany I reference in the third chapter for its similarities to this manuscript, similarly contains texts on medicine, history, and religion, among other things (*Explore Archives and Manuscripts*). This miscellany not only contains some of the same texts as MS 123, but it covers the same general topics as well. The similarity of the content of this manuscript to other roughly contemporary miscellanies makes it a useful and representative text to study.

¹³⁶ These include the volvelle on f.65r and a man with astrological labels on f.85v, which I discuss in chapter three.

Much like the subjects that the manuscript itself addresses, the content of each individual excerpt incorporates elements that are representative of their time. Every excerpt that I researched from this manuscript is either a famous text itself or incorporates elements from other, more famous texts. The “Sultan Letters” and “List of Kings” incorporate qualities of crusades and travel romances that would have been popular in the fifteenth century, “Modyr of Maries III” includes excerpts and retell stories from the *Golden Legend*, and the two medical texts are well-known themselves. Each text shows the influence of contemporary cultural events and changes. They demonstrate shifts in language as written English was developing and the impact of major events and movements such as the crusades, plague, and Wyclifism. These texts reveal the complex way that certain events and figures interacted and impact people’s interests and beliefs. It is easy to separate these events and miss their interplay, especially when looking at texts that intentionally address or comment on one issue in particular. In a miscellany, however, we can see how a greater variety of topics were influenced by the combination of these things. The conventionality and range of this manuscript make it a particularly good resource for understanding what was culturally relevant and impactful during the fifteenth century.

In order to better understand and utilize this useful manuscript, it is important that it is fully transcribed, more accurately classified, and further considered. Very little of this manuscript has been transcribed, making its content all but inaccessible. Due to time constraints, I was only able to transcribe a few English selections. My sampling only touches on a small portion of this manuscript’s content, but I still found a wealth of information contained within these excerpts. If the rest of this manuscript were transcribed, it would present the full range of language and topics and make this content easier to study. Correctly identifying the texts that occur in other manuscripts would also make the study of these works much easier. The texts that

occur in this manuscript and elsewhere should be better identified, so that they can be put into conversation with these other occurrences. Specifically, “Diet & Bloodletting” should be recognized as a B text to aid in others’ future research. A more effective classification of this manuscript could lead to further study of its contents, which it needs and deserves. The unusual texts that have not been identified elsewhere, however, are equally as deserving of study. The “Sultan Letters” does not seem to appear in another manuscript nor does it align with the other content found within this manuscript. Its unusualness alone makes it of interest, but its relationship to significant romances, reflection of English thought during the crusades, and modern-day cultural relevance drastically enhance its importance both for our understanding the Middle Age and current cultural concerns. A full transcription and better classification of this manuscript would make the wealth of information it has to offer on issues of the fifteenth century more accessible and, with further study, improve our understanding of the world then and how that has influenced the world of today.

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